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Failure as a Precondition for Success – the Transformation of East German Agriculture Revisited

Abstract

This paper asks why the transformation of the East German agricultural sector did not occur as politically intended: decollectivisation and a change to small family farms did not take place. In order to answer this question the two dominant sociological concepts of transformation, transfer of institutions and delayed modernisation, are first considered. Afterwards the theoretical and methodological approaches and results of socio-agricultural studies are presented. Based on the interpretation of the findings of these studies the main characteristics of the agricultural transformation are identified. The paper ends with the thesis that, as was typical for the German reading of the transformation process was its interpretation within the "order of time". This implied a devaluation and ignorance of whatever was not in line with the concept of modernisation.

Keywords: Agricultural transformation, institutional transfer, delayed modernisation, East Germany LPG, collectivisation, decollectivisation, social and functional differentiation, order of time

Introduction

The transformation of the German Democratic Republic into the German Federal Republic represents a very special case of the transition of a former socialist society in several aspects, simply because from the very beginning there was no question about the result transformation would bring: Homogenisation of East Germany to West Germany. The dominant sociological concepts

analysing this change as well as the policy of transformation corresponded to this goal. In almost all economic sectors and societal areas transformation mainly took place as intended, except for the agricultural sector. This sector showed a notable institutional and structural persistence: decollectivisation and the transformation into smaller farms were not achieved. In this paper we concentrate on two questions: How do transformation studies on the agricultural sector explain that the transformation process occurred differently to what had been intended? Why did the sociological concepts of transformation processes ignore the characteristics of the agricultural sector?

Transformation Models and Results

Almost as soon as West German politicians believed they could equalize East and West German living conditions with the adoption of the old federal republic's political, legal, economic and social systems, social sciences were also ready with models for the course of the imminent transformation processes[1]. In 1991/1992, the two most influential transformation theory arguments were formulated: the model of institutional transfer and that of delayed modernisation. Their popularity was, however, not limited to scientific discussion – they soon attained practical significance.

The model of institutional transfer was introduced to the political science debate by Gerhard Lehmbruch in order to mark the special nature of the East German transformation in comparison to the transformation processes in the other former socialist countries (Lehmbruch 1992, pp. 41–66). Lehmbruch understood institutional transfer as *a transfer of the West German economic and social order through the first state contract and then the further transfer of specific sectoral institutions in the second state contract* (Lehmbruch1996, p. 65). Thus institutional transfer means the adoption of the legal political basis institutions according to the pattern of the former German Federal Republic. This was tied to the expectation that the equalisation of the institutions *more or less forced an equalisation with the western living conditions* (Burkhardt 2003, p. 295). The model of delayed modernisation was mainly introduced

[1] This article summarizes our contribution in the ZAA: Eva Barlösius and Claudia Neu (2003), *Scheitern als Vorbedingung zum Erfolg – der Wandel der ostdeutschen Landwirtschaft nach 1989*, [Failure as a Precondition for Success – The Transformation of East German Agriculture after 1989], ZAA 51, 2, pp. 56–77.

into transformation research by Wolfgang Zapf. Zapf voiced the fact that *only modernisation theory hardened through the use of conflict and innovation theory is a suitable approach to understand the breakdowns in the East*. The transformation of the former socialist countries can be considered as a special modernisation process, which in contrast to the *open modernisation process of evolutionary innovation typical of western society, stands out since the goal is well known* (Zapf 1994, p. 124). Here too, his conviction becomes evident that through catching-up, or rather via overhauling processes, an equalization of the living conditions takes place on its own.

If one looks at the specific institutions from a distance, or rather at the theoretical modernisation assumptions in both models, then it can be seen that they are both based on a broadly similar perspective on transformation: Transformation as a *monitored formation change with a known assumed 'receiving society' (Ankunftsgesellschaft)* (Brussig, Ettrich and Kollmorgen, p. 8). From a theoretical perspective this concept doesn't seem to hold any great problems. For the transformation practice this is less true, as could soon be seen[2].

Since the second half of the 1990s, it has become increasingly apparent that *a certain discrepancy between perceptions, attitudes and perspective of transformation research, on the one hand, and the practical knowledge of the actors as well as the results they achieve with the processes on the other* had emerged and increasingly deepened. The "institutional ideals" of the German Federal Republic proved to *be to a limited extent the solution to all control problems* that emerged in the new federal states (Wiesenthal, 1997, pp. 239–244). This was especially true in the case of the East German agricultural sector. The original transformation goal was to change socialist GDR agriculture into small family farms based on the Western European model, but this venture was a general mistake.

Until today, common production large-scale farms dominate East Germany, with a much higher land area than in West Germany. Of the 29,500 farms in East Germany, in 2005 about 3,300 were formed as legal persons with private rights (e.G, GmbH, and CoKG, corporations). These institutions, however, farm more than half of the agriculturally used land in the new federal states. The average land area of a GmbH is a scant 650 hectares, that of the cooperative

[2] As was to be expected, both transformation models were quickly criticised as being too simple. An overview of the criticism can be found in the special issue "Theoretische Probleme der Transformationsforschung" des Berliner Journal für Soziologie 1994, Heft 3.

farms (e.G.) about 1,400 hectares. Furthermore, there are about 3,200 personal associations (GbR, OHG, GmbH and CoKG) that have on average little more than 400 hectares available and taken together, cover almost one quarter of the land area in eastern Germany. Another quarter of the land is farmed by 23,000 private farmers, the overwhelming majority of whom are part-time farmers. In 2005, East German farms had an average of 189 hectares of agricultural land, the West Germans, in contrast, only little more than 32 hectares (Statistisches Bundesamt 2005, p. 31).

These very different land area sizes between East and West German farms as well as the high portion of farmers in the legal form "incorporated" – especially the cooperatives – clearly show that the original transformation goals – decollectivisation and the transformation into smaller farms – was not achieved. And this, in turn, is an indication that the predictions of the two transformation models were not fulfilled in practice, at least not for the agricultural sector[3].

Failed Institutional Transfer and Unachieved Delayed Modernisation – Social Scientific Work in the Agricultural Sector

At the start of the 1990s, social scientists working on transformation hardly paid any attention at all to the agricultural sector. During the course of the late 1990s this changed. Since then the agricultural sector has been mentioned more often in social science transformation literature – especially in surveying contributions (Kollmorgen 2003, pp. 255–286). Only few publications are dedicated exclusively to the agricultural sector. Among these the 1996 essay by Ralf Clasen and Ilka John "The Agricultural Sector. A special transformation case?" as well as the 1998 article by Gerhard Lehmbruch and Jörg Mayer "Collective Businesses in Adjustment Process: the Agricultural Sector" are noteworthy (Clasen and John 1996, pp. 333–364). For Clasen and John, the transformation of the agricultural sector is a special case because *there is no tested, largely accepted western model that can prove the economic advantages in a system competition*. Thus the transformation process stereotype of a small

[3] As early as 1991, Frederic Pryor drew attention to the fact that political efforts to decollectivise agriculture must expect resistance and thus in some former socialist countries would probably fail. Frederic L. Pryor, When is Collectivization Reversible? in: Studies in Comparative Communism, XXIV(1991)1, pp. 3–24.

family farm is based on a *mix of ideological and economic lines of conflict,* and would thus not have represented any convincing institutional offering. Although Clasen and John had placed a question mark behind their estimates of the agricultural sector being a special case, it would not appear as if it were generally recognised that East German agriculture is a convincing – if not the most prominent – example that the *individual sectoral specific transformation dynamics* are often considered too seldom in the models and analyses (Clasen and John 1996, p. 192). Lehmbruch and Mayer characterize the agricultural sector as *an exception to the rule on which the conditions of sectoral institutional transfer can be defined more sharply*. Instead of a comprehensive institutional transfer, the *identity of the agricultural sector over the systemic change* is largely maintained, which is shown in a *surprising level of continuity of elements of sectoral governance* (Lehmbruch and Mayer 1996, p. 333). It is therefore urgently necessary to, more intensively than in the first years after reunification, develop sector specific transformation studies. During this time, the GDR-typical social involvement of the individual sectors had to be considered more than in the past. Only in this way could the current and still continuing change processes be observed and explained.

In his review of the transformation research, Burkhardt Lutz emphatically pointed to the development of East German agriculture and villages, because here it can be demonstrated that the often "unreflected transfer" of western theoretical concepts and empirical instruments lead to a no longer correctable fading out of entire topics and developments. The cause was that the *social science transformation research was almost completely marked by the prevalent interest and perspective and the current topics of western science.* Thus it is just the "exception" of the LPG successor farms that are responsible that agriculture today is one of the most stable and prospering economic branches in East Germany (Laschewski 1998, p. 295). In short: the exception from the rule which transformation research and practice presented became the basis for the success of East German agriculture.

In summary, it can be established that even with the growing interest of the social sciences in the East German Agricultural sector, agriculture is rarely a research subject. Mostly the agricultural sector is merely drawn upon in order to prove the lack of complexity and flexibility of the transformation models from the early 1990s[4]. Thus the continuation of large, in many cases

[4] This does not hold true for Clasen/John and Lehmbruch/Mayer. Possibly the agricultural sector represents just a particularly conspicuous example.

collectively operating, agricultural enterprises plays out as counterevidence for a "comprehensive institutional transfer" in the field. In addition, the high economic performance ability of East German agriculture in comparison to West German family farms serves as evidence for the assertion that a generally delayed modernisation of the GDR is not necessarily supportable and must be considered individually for each sector. Thus East German agriculture has proved to be a stumbling block for the thesis of delayed modernisation. For the as yet incomplete institutional transfer and the failed delayed modernisation the following reasons are given:

- *Ownership rights:* The system of collective economy proves to be resistant *because from the previous 'cooperative property' residual ownership rights of farmers previously forced into cooperation were released* (Lehmbruch, 1996, p. 76). Thus the state possessed *no authority of the reorganisation of ownership rights* (Lehmbruch and Mayer 1996, p. 343)[5]. The debate on ownership was negotiated between LPG members.
- *Collective Farming*: In contrast to the basic conviction in Western Germany that only small family farms provide an efficient enterprise, LPG members have gained experience over the years that shows the contrary to be true. The continuation of collective farming appeared to them to provide greater yields and be more future-oriented. Apart from that, collective farming offered better working conditions than classic small family farming.
- *Independent actors and collective negotiation resources:* While the transformation generally took place "without East German actors", in the agricultural sector no actor transfer took place. There, the "strong autochthonic actors" were present, allowing the objectives of the West German actors to at least partially run into nothingness (Kollmorgen 2003, p. 273). With the LPG member assembly an institution was established which *promoted residual autonomy and thus collective negotiating resources* (Lehmbruch 1996, p. 76). This was made clearly evident by the fact that the German Farmers Association, at first completely opposed to the collective large farm agriculture, had a change of heart due to the ability of the LPG successor farms, and in order not to place its *representation monopoly and*

[5] The consequence is that agriculture is an economic branch that is found more in East German ownership. See Regine Wieland, *Landwirtschaftliche Unternehmensgenese im Transformationsprozeß. Fallbeispiel der Restrukturierung einer Landwirtschaftlichen Produktionsgenossenschaft in Brandenburg* [Formation of Agrarian Enterprises during the Transformation Process. A Case Study on the Re-Structuralisation of an Agricultural Production Cooperative in Brandenburg], Kiel 1996.

strong position of the association in the policy network with a competing special interest association.

– *Governance structures:* As Rainer M. Lepsius identified the company to be the core social anchor for industrial production, this was even more true for the LPG. They had the broad reaching function of *a type of regional development company* (Lehmbruch and Mayer 1996, p. 341). With the implementation of the collective large area farming, was linked that the governance structures of rural areas from small family farms to large area farms was changed, whereby a specific social embeddedness developed (Lehmbruch and Mayer 1996, pp. 337, 347).

The reasons listed for the exception "agriculture" – efficiency advantages, collective negotiating resources and independent actors – all stand in contrast to the basic assumptions of both transformation models and thus place them into question empirically as well as theoretically. The exception "agriculture" can thus not be understood by including some facts specific to agriculture. Just as unconvincing is the assumption that the "transformation theoretical problem case" can be traced back to the exceptional tenacity of the East German agricultural sector and village structures, because it is underestimated how villages experienced enormous conversion and agricultural adaptation processes after 1989, in order to meet the new challenges – particularly EU agricultural policy.

Transformation Pathways – Socio-agricultural Studies

Below we introduce some socio-agricultural studies on the transformation of agriculture and rural areas. Here we are not dealing with a complete presentation on the state of the research. The selected papers consider selected questions with theoretical and methodical approaches and results of an exemplary nature. Despite all differences, the presented papers all have in common (more or less clearly) the question of why collective agriculture in East Germany, despite all resistance, could succeed. Or, in other words, why did East German farmers decide against small family farms.

The first three studies (Hagedorn et al., Thiele, Wieland) consider the agricultural transformation primarily from an institutional economic perspective. They study which influences the changed (agricultural) policy framework conditions had on the change in East German agriculture – especially for decisions on a type of farm. The work of Laschewski and

Krambach, among others, provides important information that the decision for or against the continuation of cooperatives organised farms was most significantly affected by social relationship, interaction, domestic differences and power constellations within the LPG. Neu and Brauer, among others, directed their view not only towards the direct time of reunification, but also include social structural changes (occupational and family structures) that were already in practice in the GDR. Thus it becomes clear, that above all individual room for manoeuvre – largely marked by the individual and familial situation in the GDR – decides the fate of agriculture.

Change in Framework Conditions

The transformation of East German agriculture is considered by Hagedorn et al.[6] primarily in the question about how agricultural policy framework conditions influence post-reunification development of agriculture and rural areas. This institutional economic approach was chosen since living conditions in the New Federal States were largely determined by institutional and economic change which in turn was mostly a result of agricultural policy measures. Among other things immediate support measures to take pressure off the markets and to aid the agricultural sector were used, as well as adjustment help for farms, agricultural structure development aid to ease the restructuring processes, new regulations to privatise public areas and much more. In all, these measures caused broad diversification of the type of enterprises, which will continue "in the foreseeable future"(Hagedorn et al 1997, p. 377). With regard to the support of single farms, Hagedorn et al. carefully confirm *that the conditions of support of ventures of this legal form, which is in accordance with the model of the agricultural family business, were created in an especially favourable manner* (Hagedorn et al 1997, p. 416). It is noteworthy that with regard to labour productivity and capital gains, single farms and business partnerships suffered in contrast with the corporations after the mid-990s (Hagedorn et al 1997, p. 417).

[6] Out of a number of papers by the research group led by Konrad Hagedorn, the following exemplary text was chosen: Konrad Hagedorn et al. (1997), *Politische und ökonomische Rahmenbedingungen für die Entwicklung ländlicher Räume in den neuen Bundesländern*, [Political and Economical Framework Requirements for the Development of Rural Areas in the New Bundesländer], in: A. Becker (ed.), *Regionale Strukturen im Wandel* [Regional Structures during Change], KSPW Bd. 5.1, Opladen, pp. 355–500.

The way in which the agricultural transformation occurred is presented in a completely neutral manner by Hagedorn et al. Nonetheless he makes one judgement: Under enormous pressure to adapt the LPG successor farms stabilised increasingly and the income situation of the farms – with substantial financial help and state transfer benefits – developed relatively positively (Hagedorn et al 1997, p. 481). At the same time, the authors warned in the mid-1990s against a final judgement of the agricultural policy promotional instrument. Accordingly, *although the release of agricultural labourers is reducing greatly and the income situation on full-time farms has adjusted to the level of the former German states, adequate competitive ability cannot as yet be concluded* (Hagedorn et al 1997, p. 482).

Low Structural Adaptation Pressure – Great Economic Stability

In his agricultural economics paper "Decollectivisation and Restructuring of the Agricultural Sector in the New Federal States," Holger Thiele differentiates greatly between two phases of the transformation – firstly the decollectivisation given through the agricultural adaptation laws and in the return of the assets of the LPG into private ownership and the transfer of the LPG into a free market economy and secondly the restructuring of successor farms, which are mainly determined by the development of existing debt, land lease prices and EU agricultural policy (Thiele 1998).

He emphasises the effects of assets decisions on the LPG successor farms, which he analyses with game theory decision models. It was to be expected that the successor farms are burdened with high economic requirements of departing LPG members, which has as a consequence a permanent economic destabilisation. In reality, the opposite happened, the successor farms showed unexpected economic stability. The reasons are that at the beginning of decollectivisation many LPG members left their own capital on the successor farms because they hoped they would get permanent jobs. Although a little later only half of the private investors were employed on the successor farms and thus the motive of job security fell away, many former LPG members did not withdraw their investments. This was caused by a strong identification with the former LPG and a great solidarity with former colleagues. The agricultural cooperative could thus pursue "objectives and strategies that led to a slowing of the transformation" and simultaneously stabilised the farms (Thiele 1998, p. 58).

There was no great external pressure to adapt towards the direction of small farm agriculture due to restructurings like EU price compensation and set aside payments or the promotional policy. Quite the contrary, these factors also tended to contribute more to strengthening and stabilizing the large collective farms (Thiele 1998, p. 224).

An Explorative Case Study on the Restructuring of an LPG

In contrast to previous studies, Regine Wieland chose a micro-theoretical basis for her study: "Agricultural Enterprise Genesis in the Transformation Process". For this purpose she carried out an explorative case study on the restructuring of a former LPG. The emphasis lay on the reconstruction of the decision making processes for the change of the LPG into a registered cooperative and the later outsourcing of production into operating companies. Wieland was particularly interested in the question of if and how the LPG members affected these decision-making processes.

While the LPG was formally considered to be a cooperative, it appears that in practice very few decisions were reached collectively. The majority of LPG members thus had no experience of collective decision-making processes in 1990. In addition, most landowners and inventory providers were not at all active in the LPG at the time of the division of assets.

The members were hardly informed about the course of the conversion of an LPG into another form of enterprise. And apart from that, most members were afraid of direct confrontation with management circles (Wieland 1996, p. 157). In addition, they said that a cooperative was the most secure and closest legal and ownership entity to the LPG, meaning that it carried fewest changes. Ultimately they hoped that in a cooperative as many jobs as possible would be maintained. These four aspects explain the great sympathy of the LPG members for the conversion of the LPG into a cooperative.

The members did not protest against the subsequent lay-offs because the first annual meeting of the cooperative members took place afterwards. The outsourcing of production processes of operating companies was not protested because for most individuals it eventually became apparent that not the self-administrating organs of the collective but rather only the management of the operating companies could establish working conditions (Wieland 1996, p. 182).

Wieland highlights the continuity of the practice to refuse the participation of former LPG members and current cooperative members in the most important decision making processes, though methods employed were different. Thus she communicates, without stating it explicitly, the impression that LPG members only accompanied the conversion to a cooperative with good will because they hoped to keep the changes to a minimum, while management wanted to clarify the unclear and complicated authority structures of the agricultural cooperative and to transform them towards the direction of an asset oriented structure and simpler organisation (Wieland 1996, p. 188).

Culture and Identity

Beneath the level of macro-structural institution transfer, Lutz Laschewski starts with his "Study on the transformation of cooperatively organised agricultural enterprises in East Germany", the phrase being the subtitle of his 1998 dissertation on "From the LPG to Agricultural Cooperative". Laschewski presents the theory that in order to understand the restructuring processes, an analysis of the internal social interaction in the LPG is required because the internal organisation principles were not placed under so much scrutiny as an external viewpoint often assumes (Laschewski 1998, p. 159). He analyses the internal events in an organisational-sociological manner and pushes the "social relationships (interactions) of those involved in the enterprise" to the forefront. These possess a social self-dynamic, which is why the optimal enterprise models succeeded in the course of the restructuring of the LPG. This also explains the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the enterprise forms (Laschewski 1998, p. 12).

From the empirical material (case studies and surveys in Saxony – Anhalt) on the topic group "Culture and Identity" he extracts two perception schemes that had a part in the different experiences and forms of the transformation. In the first place, the focus is on self understanding as a farmer, above all with perceived attributes land ownership, village and a specific work ethic. This self-portrait is in no way limited to the small family farm, it is even more compatible with farming in a cooperative. The second scheme stands on the basic perception of labour which is oriented on the model of industrial labour. This perception of work is above all connected with a lack of land, youth or ties to a specific place. Both perception schemes simultaneously mark the social differentiation lines in the studied villages, which run along the lines of land

ownership, age and formal farm structure (Laschewski 1998, p. 93). According to these social differentiations, a central decision for the restructuring of the LPG took place which was mostly decided upon by the farmers (land owners) in part in informal farmers meetings. The creation of small family farms was not as a realistic alternative, because farmers like other workers did not perceive the LPG experiences to be essentially negative and saw collective farming as realistic and doable. The farmers' effort to take control of enterprises was a priority (Laschewski 1998, p. 115).

Since this is still the case in farming circles in the place studies, farmers were successful in organizing informally and securing positions of power.

Community as a Social Value

Just after German reunification, Kurt Krambach's research group asked why the majority of farmers from the cooperatives chose collective enterprises. Krambach proved in different empirical analyses (Krambach 1992, pp. 1197––1208; Krambach 1995) that in 1991 only a minority of 3.3 per cent of the surveyed former LPG members could imagine occupational perspectives on small family farms, whereas 10.4 per cent of the collective farmers did have this thought (Krambach 1992, p. 1198).

In addition to the social and economic reasons for the decision to retain the collective farming approach, many socio-agricultural studies mentioned the special significance of common experiences and values – meaning the so-called social components, i.e. responsibility for retaining jobs, lack of own capital, lack of farm or business knowledge, are emphasised by Krambach over and over again. Over the years, cooperative farms experienced first hand how desirable work and life in an agricultural collective can be. These experiences had the quality of long-term socialisation effects. Krambach sees "fear of job loss" and "community as a social value" as the two decisive reasons for the continuation of commonly working farms. *The persistence of these socialisation effects and the new experiences of social insecurity are responsible for the fact that – contra diverse external restrictions – cooperative enterprises developed out of the earlier LPG during the restructuring and were maintained*. He sees a *conscious alternative to a possible new or re-establishment of the small family farms* in the decision for cooperative production. Compared to this decision

to adopt the cooperative farm, *the choice of the legal form of a cooperative was mostly of a secondary nature for most employees* (Krambach 1996, p. 41).

Rural Social Structure and Individual Room for Action

On the basis of four LPGs, which converted into agricultural cooperatives, Claudia Neu studied the post-reunification-business paths of former collective farmers in order to illustrate reasons for the retention of collective farming on this micro level (Neu 2003 and Neu 2002, pp. 143–169). Her approach is that through the political intervention of the SED, not only the traditional agricultural structures were essentially changed, but to an equal extent the rural social structures were transformed. The collectivisation and consequent industrialisation of agriculture set a process of "de-farming" and "de-traditionalising" in motion in rural areas. Overall, the situation is ambivalent: collectivisation was experienced as economic expropriation and loss of farmer autonomy, while the working organisation in the LPG – at least formally – created new "freedoms", for example scheduled working times, and guaranteed free time and thus a reduction of farmer self-exploitation.

In contrast, the ideological belief that serious inequalities between large landowners and small farmers must be eliminated with the implementation of a homogeneous farm system – a clearly vertical business and prestige structure emerged in the LPG. This was not least a consequence of the immense specialisation and professionalisation in GDR agriculture. In the process of system transformation the results for the cooperative farmers – along the farm hierarchies – gave very different individual room for negotiation. Those cooperative workers who left with qualifications and professional positions, and were evaluated outside agriculture, for example in trade or management, mostly withstood the transformation of agriculture without great social descent – some even improved their standing. In contrast, the majority of farmers with low qualifications or older farmers either became unemployed or retired. In summary: the cooperative farmers did in no way proceed on a path of collective transformation, but rather in dependence on their jobs in the LPG and their education, underwent a process of social differentiation based on factors such as age, gender, education and jobs. Few LPG members remained in the successor farms, most left agriculture forever.

Intergenerational pathways and family biography breaks

In the community study "Tranlin" carried out by Kai Brauer, Andreas Willisch and Frank Ernst in a village in Mecklenburg in the first half of the 1990s, ethnological, historical and sociological – qualitative and quantitative – approaches are combined (Brauer, Ernst and Willisch 1999, pp. 1325–1428 and Brauer, Ernst and Willisch 1995, pp. 736–749).

This study also considers the question of why the founding of small and average-sized farms was so sluggish. The authors worked primarily on the basis of family sociological concepts. Here they assume that family farms require a secure "biographical structural logic of farm generations", meaning a family biography based in agriculture. They call this an "intergenerational path", which is indispensable for farms. Should this path end, the consequence is the end of the family farm.

Through the collectivisation of GDR agriculture in the 1950s, the international context of the farm family was torn, because *the most important reasons, to tie at least one child to the farm* (Brauer, Ernst and Willisch 1995, p. 742) and thus secure farm succession, became obsolete. Since the original family status in farming could no longer be secured, non-agricultural perspectives had to be developed for the children. For this reason the farmers placed their children on a biographical path leading away from farming. For the most part the families succeeded. After reunification, the children were just as available to reinstitute the family farm as their parents who were at this point too old. But it was no longer possible to revitalize the family tradition destroyed by collectivisation.

This was different for salaried farmers; at least the intergenerational prerequisites were more favourable. The majority of their adult children lived with them or in the vicinity. These families possessed the family prerequisites and the necessary agricultural knowledge. But they lacked land, stables or financial resources to purchase both. Brauer, among others, criticises that it is false to conclude from the small number of family farms that readiness for the creation or renewal of a small family farm of the cooperative farmers was lacking. The families' biographical breaks or a lack of resources were far more responsible for the described developments (Brauer, Ernst and Willisch 1999, p. 1422).

Résumé: Characteristics of Agricultural Transformation

The socio-agricultural studies illuminate many aspects of the large topic of GDR agriculture and its conversion after 1989. In particular they show, with which agricultural structural and institutional givens the LPS on the one hand, and with which social, occupational and familial experiences and resources the LPG members on the other hand went into the process of transformation and which restructuring options and future perspectives resulted. On the basis of the multiplicity of empirical studies it is revealed that with macro models such as institutional transfer or delayed modernizing the "failure of transformation goals" in East German agriculture can be observed but not explained. These are too abstractly formulated for the true transformation to be understood. Four central research results make the difference between socio-agricultural science and general transformation research especially clear:

1) While general transformation research emphasises the tenacity of the East German agricultural sector, which is attached to the surprisingly low perceived level of decollectivisation and the broadly maintained large farm agricultural structures, socio-agricultural studies emphasise that since reunification an enormous rebuilding of the East German agricultural sector has taken place and – directly tied to it – the rural living situation, in particular the future hopes and perspectives of the rural population, has changed considerably. For a comparable structural change in agriculture within so few years there are probably no parallels in agricultural history to date (Pollack 1999, p. 1468). Within this immense structural change the transformation of the former LPG into a new legal form was only one challenge in the framework of general legal adjustments. It was not of such great importance as is often assumed, in any case not from the perspective of the majority of LPG members. This can be seen by the fact that transformation into an agricultural cooperative was mainly preferred only because one assumed that this legal form would carry fewest changes with it.

   Here the question arises, how the measure and success of the transformation can be calculated. If it is based on the same institutions and structures being created as in West Germany, then the transformation has failed. Or on the goals the LPG and their members set for themselves. If one takes the goal of the majority of the LPG members, that of keeping as

many jobs as possible, then transformation was unsuccessful. If, however the objective is to ensure economic survival of farms, then transformation – particularly in comparison to other economic sectors – was successful. Thus it can be established that the extent of the agricultural change is underestimated if transformation models are used that judge successful or failed transformation above all on the changes in ownership and farm sizes, without taking the options and intentions of the local actors into consideration adequately.

2) Socio-agricultural studies show that through the massive reshaping of agriculture in the GDR the social, familial, occupational and mental requirements for transformation to a classic family farm were gone. Thus the familial, social and occupational docking stations for a restructuring of the private farms hardly existed. In order to understand why, after reunification, these processes could no longer be turned around; a structural analytical perspective is required. Structural analytical studies show that through the "socialist restructuring" of agriculture and rural areas, social forms emerged with which the rural population arranged their life and family perspective over the course of the years. Hence, a large number of farm families placed their children on social and occupational roads leading out of agriculture is an expression of this. In this way they – possibly unintentionally — contributed to a permanent solidification of the politically driven social structural transformation and permanently destroyed the social requirements for a return to non-collective and small family farming[7]. Thus a certain level of dependence on pathways resulted for the restructuring of agriculture after reunification. The transformation objectives could only seldom be linked to actual individuals and family room for negotiation, even if some saw worthy future perspectives there.
3) From a structural perspective, the socialist restructuring of agriculture – seen very abstractly – deals with processes of social and functional differentiation which are closely linked to processes of homogenisation. Among the differentiation processes are primarily those internal to the organisation in the LPG, and among the homogenisation processes the collectivisation of agriculture and the close association of the village with the LPG are generally included. The collectivisation is particularly to be seen from a capitalist perspective, because it undertakes no separation

[7] This was more sustainable since in many rural regions „Ostelbien" not enough family farms existed, in many cases the "Manor house" form of farming was continued.

of business or private assets, but rather emphasises common ownership. However, collectivisation did not lead *to collectives of owners working themselves but to large farms with truly dependent employees* (Land and Willisch 2002, p. 139). If one does thus not consider the ownership and farm structures, but true working relationships, then one could interpret the work organizational results of the collectivisation as differentiation processes – not exclusively, but additionally. This is different in the case of the close ties between a village and a LPG which became consistently stronger over the course of GDR history. Just as the industrial enterprises were used as central "socialization centres" (Lepsius), the LPG were increasingly assigned the role of integrating institutions for rural society. Over the years an "essential identity of farm and rural social body" grew out of this (Land and Willisch 2002, p. 143).

If one considers very general signs of modern farm management such as the separation of household and farm, rational work organisation with an internal farm hierarchy and professional specialisation in order to compare the organisation of the farm production in the LPG with that on family farms, then one can see that the LPG have a more advanced rationalisation[8]. Thus broad changes in agricultural production styles and working conditions were made to those in this industry. This can be qualified as a rationalisation of agriculture.

4) The transformation models are mostly concentrated on the ownership and business structures as clear indicators and a measure for the achievement of transformation goals. If one observed the transformation on the basis of the more basic structural analytical distinction between differentiation and homogenisation processes, it can be seen that after 1989, differentiation and rationalisation processes are further promoted. This holds true in particular for the increasing rationalisation and economisation of production, which for example is implemented by a massive reduction in jobs and a consistent orientation to EU agricultural policy. Internal farm reorganisation was hardly necessary. Large rationalisation phases were first made possible by the loosening of the close association of farms and villages. The close relationship between farm and village, especially

[8] At this point we cite factors listed by Max Weber. In his opinion, they must be fulfilled for both the capitalist as well as the rationally managed socialist farm. See Max Weber (1920), *Vorbemerkung*, in: ders, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I* [Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion I], Tübingen, pp. 1–16.

the functional use of the farm for cultural purposes and social services, was almost completely eliminated within a few years. This contributed to the "paradox phenomenon" that the *farms prospered and the communities sank into poverty* (Willisch and Laschewski 2001, p. 3). This contradiction is the result of advanced functional differentiation primarily on economic criteria that first came through the almost complete political withdrawal of farms from cultural and social tasks after 1989.

If one applies these four characteristics to the two transformation models "institutional transfer" and "delayed modernisation", then in addition to the reasons mentioned above (ownership rights, collective business activity, actors, governance structures) two additional, basic arguments can be given for why these models do not apply to the agricultural sector.

1) The model of institutional transfer grants, the conversion of property and company structure play a very large role in the transformation process. Thus other – for the actors more meaningful – changes tend to be underestimated. If these changes are measured on the projected goal of the creation of a mainly family farm-defined agricultural economy, then they fall outside the scope of the observations.
2) The model of delayed modernisation could not penetrate East German agricultural areas because the model of the "family farm" is in every aspect of economically effective farm management from a modernisation theory perspective not marked by progress but rather by missed opportunities. However – also considered from the perspective of modernization theory – since 1989 enormous modernisation has taken place. Here homogenisation typical for the "socialist landscape" was rescinded and a massive rationalisation of production undertaken.

Catching up or Leading the Way – Different or the Same

The above summary seems to show that the model of delayed modernisation contradicts the statement that GDR agriculture was not only less modern than West German agriculture, but more modern since it in part shows a form of faster modernisation. But: more interesting than a repetition of the debate, evidence of false conclusions or the identification of perspectives which are too high, to us appears to be the question of why transformation concepts, models and analyses, almost without exception, even if they criticize a modern theoretical interpretation, ultimately revert to the thought patterns of a time

order of social conditions. These thought patterns document time as a measure for societal movement and order them under "before" and "after", Even Juergen Habermas, who always kept his distance from the modernisation theory, used this time thought pattern with the concept of a "delayed revolution". The "delayed revolution" can be recognised as a revolution that is rewound to a certain extent, clearing the way to catch up on missed experiences" (Habermas 1990, p. 180). To place thought pattern social developments into a time frame-especially those that are perceived as transformation – is not typical for the modernisation theory perspective but is of a general character.

Niklas Luhmann also showed at many points in his work that, in modernity, in social descriptions, the category *the differentness is transformed into an order of time (*Luhmann 1991, p. 44). All time perceptions require the primary difference "before" and "after," while different social developments are brought into a temporal series. Luhmann calls this the "temporisation of societal differences." Though the temporisation, social differentness – meaning differences in being – are translated into a time order and the time to an "evaluable point of reference" (Luhmann 1991, p. 46).

This can particularly be seen in the modernisation theory, especially in its transformation theoretical version and empirically over clear in the targeted and planned social transformations. Because if the *present is understood as the difference between past and future, it is not difficult to mark it as a decision* (Luhmann 1997, p. 1010). Thus, for societal transformation so described it results as if it were only a question of decision – regardless of how this question emerged and to whom it can be attributed – whether and how the goals and intentions of transformation are realised. Only if it is assumed that it has to do with decision making processes, can the transformation which took place in agriculture be attributed to the goals and intentions of LPG members and conversely the agricultural transformation as a result of a decision-making process. Against this background it first becomes understandable that the difference between the two German agricultural sectors is mostly in the time linked terminology from postponed or early modernity, although it is also the terminology for differentness and sameness. This is primarily true for the social studies work in the agricultural sector, which relies on general transformation models or theories. Secondly, it becomes understandable, on which basis the agricultural social sciences "work off". They try to explain why (in the sense of the delayed modernisation pre-modern) cooperative farms did not choose the (believed to be) more modern West German agricultural model. Even where the socio-agricultural studies (silently) counter the theory

of delayed modernisation, they either create or reconstruct the transformation of the agricultural sector as a decision making process. The majority of studies concentrate on social, mental and economic motives, which serve as a basis for the continuation of collective, large farm agriculture, to present it to derive their genesis from the personal and generative experiences in GDR agriculture. The subtext of some studies shows however that the multiplicity of the LPG members did not experience the transformation of the LPG as a decision making process or even intentionally partook, but rather only hoped for the "maintenance of the familiar" and a slowing of the processes of change. But the shapers of agricultural transformation did not plan this in its entirety, but rather decided step by step. Thus the trend is towards a concentration on the decision making processes from a measure of intentionality and target that was probably not always a given[9]. This is in no way specific for these studies, but rather typical for many social science studies. It becomes problematic if the assumed intentionality and targets of the actors are evaluated as a position to the total transformation process.

Conclusion

The German transformation process is characterised through the clear definition of the "receiving society". Both dominant theoretical concepts – institutional transfer and the model of delayed modernisation – which were quickly put into political practise, presumed that transformation is more or less a question of time. This assumption led to several analyses, which described the economic and societal differences between East and West Germany in categories of more or less modern, social and functional differentiation. In doing so, differences representing diversity or another form of modernity were not realised, which, combined with the concentration of institutions and structural analogies, caused several "blinde Flecken" (blind spots). So the sociological concepts as well as the agricultural policy focused on decollectivisation and the creation of family farms without sufficiently considering social structural and mentality changes and specific forms of rationalization that had been taking place during and after collectivisation. This finding is not restricted to the agricultural sector, but here it is especially striking because the change of property rights was one of the main targets of the transformation process. The prevailing reading and interpretation of

[9] One can in retrospect call this subsequent rationalisation.

the transformation process concluded that a delayed modernisation came along with the devaluation of diversity or another form of modernity. The extraordinary aspect of the case of the agricultural sector is that sticking to institutions, structures and mentalities regarded as "socialist" was the precondition for economic success.

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