

Land Fragmentation in CEEC: An Overview

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Abstract

After 50 years of collectivisation, countries in Central and Eastern Europe CEE have made significant progress in the devolution of state-owned real estate to private urban and rural owners. This restitution of private property is considered a cornerstone for a future democratic, market economy and integration. Thus, priority was given to speed up the re-privatisation process, secure land tenure and property rights and develop land markets.

Notwithstanding the remarkable success of the land reform process, land fragmentation emerged as a side effect with detrimental implications for private and public investments, sustainable economic growth and social development. Less-favoured and least-developed regions with economies still depending on agriculture have been witnessing negative growth rates, soaring unemployment, mounting rural poverty and as a result, serious social and economic disintegration and wide-spread disappointment among local actors and stakeholders.

Land fragmentation affects mostly the agriculture sector. As a result of the distribution of co-operative and state farm-land according to equity principles without considering farm management aspects, the parcels which farmers have received are either too small and/or badly shaped, for instance in their length to width ratio. In some countries farm size averages 1 .5 to 2,5 has which makes it difficult to implement new production patterns, to utilise machinery and appropriate technologies. Re-allotment and amalgamation of plots (and parcels) is an important element to increase productivity and hence efficiency in the agriculture sector. Most private farmers are restricted to subsistence agriculture and can not participate in commercial production, which leads to migration and the abandonment of farmland, especially in areas distant to markets.

Additionally, fragmented parcels and properties, scattered over different political, juridical and administrative boundaries obstruct spatial/territorial planning especially in terms of land administration, land use planning and land management. Decision-makers from both the public and private sector are faced with limited possibilities and alternatives to allocate resources. This hampers the implementation of rural regional development policies, strategies, programs and projects aimed to improve rural livelihoods.

Collectivisation and large-scale agro-industrial crop and animal production have led to extensive clearance of the natural landscape and the degradation of natural resources. Ecological damages can not be solved at the individual level but need concerted action and joint efforts among and between public and private actors. To make water and forest conservation effective, entire watersheds, river basins or protected areas have to be delineated and demarcated. This requires consolidation and re-allotment of plots and parcels together with clear and transparent ownership rights and, hence, clear and transparent duties and responsibilities and will eventually lead to increased food security and poverty alleviation. However, land consolidation goes way beyond agriculture and focuses primarily on territorial (re)-organization, area/scenario planning, rural- regional development, village melioration etc. In order to be as comprehensive as possible and thus secure active participation of a wide range of stakeholders.

The proposed approach is holistic, the focus is on space rather than sectors including the rural-urban nexus. Since these aspects are crucial to achieve both, sustainable rural livelihoods and social stability they are ranking among the highest priorities for the governments in the region.

The presentation shows results and findings of a FAO commissioned comparative study on the impact of land fragmentation on rural society in four EU candidate countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania) Likewise it highlights necessary conditions and requisites to address the issue and describes strategies, goals and objectives of proposed land consolidation processes.

The studies underpin that land consolidation is not a single standing issue, goes beyond land administration systems, is not purely agriculture related and could well be an entrance to achieve both, food security and sustainable rural livelihoods hence it integrates measures regarding territorial organization, land management, farming systems/management, regional development, village melioration etc. in order to be as comprehensive as possible and therefore secure active participation of a wide range of stakeholders, especially on the local/regional level.