
Design, results and lessons from program evaluation: evidence from the mid-term evaluation of six rural development programmes in Germany

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Abstract

Rural development evaluation in the EU should provide information on the implementation and impacts of EAGGF co-financed programmes in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999. At the actual mid-term stage evaluation should help to re-orient the existing programmes with regard to target achievement and to improve the further implementation of existing measures. This paper is mainly focussed on the comparison of evaluation results across a group of regions (provincial states) in Germany. It aims to discuss the following aspects of the recent mid-term evaluation exercise:

- How have the opportunities and limitations of the evaluation approach specified by the above mentioned Regulation and supplemented by Commission guidelines been used to develop a practical evaluation design with a qualified mix of investigation methods (use of common questions with criteria and indicators)?
- What are the main evaluation results in terms of direct as well as indirect effects, synergy between measures and other impacts, and how do they differ between regions (states) given a variety of contextual and programming conditions?

The comparative analysis is based on experiences with the mid-term evaluation of rural development programs in six states in the north western part of Germany. Conclusions will be drawn from the experiences with regard to suitable specification of qualified procedures for program evaluation in future programming periods.

Keywords: rural development policy; mid-term evaluation; program evaluation; Germany

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1 Introduction

Since the reform of the EU structural funds in 1988, evaluation of the development programs co-financed with EU funding are required under EU regulations. In the 1990s, above all in the program phase from 1994-1999, the importance according to evaluation has systematically increased, both in terms of the frequency of evaluation as well as in intensity (Eser, 2001, p. 327). In the course of the Agenda 2000, the evaluation activities have again been significantly extended; they now include all instrumental areas of the so-called "second pillar" of agricultural policy. Thus, the contextual requirements in the EU regulations and specific evaluation themes are solidified. In particular, minimum standards for the quality of evaluations were set, and compliance with these conditions is required with an approval by the EU Commission for the co-financing of evaluation studies.

The goals of the program evaluation are diverse and vary according to stage of program and the actors being addressed. The evaluation of EU programs is in the crossfire between outward obligations derived from various the stakeholders (a summary evaluation for measurement of performance) and the search for improvement possibilities within the organisation (formative evaluation as a method for learning) (Eser, 2001, P. 335).

The previous evaluations, i.e. regarding Objective 5b-programs or the agri-environmental measures, provided extremely divergent results both in terms of methods and content. It is hardly possible to aggregate and analyse them comparably at the EU level. For this reason the EU Commission provided a standardised evaluation framework for the program period from 2000 to 2006 (EU COM, 2000). This evaluation framework is comprised of questions, criteria and indicators for each of the nine chapters of support according to Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 and additional cross-cutting questions for which criteria and indicators are also included. Difficulties that emerged in the previous evaluations and synthesis reports should in this way be prevented. (See Wathelet, 2004).

Evaluation on the basis of cross-cutting questions are the focus of this contribution. Here, two aspects are at the forefront:

1. In how far is the evaluation framework suited to answer the cross-cutting questions?
2. What results can be drawn from the mid-term evaluation at the program level?

The following descriptions are based on the mid-term evaluations of six rural development programs in various German federal states,² carried out by the Institute for Rural Areas of the German Federal Agricultural Research Centre (FAL) in the period from 2001 to 2003, in cooperation with the Institute of Economics of the German Federal Research Centre for Forestry (BFH) as well as the Working Group for Environmental and Urban Planning (ARUM).

2 Characteristics of program evaluation

2.1 Structure and content of cross-cutting questions

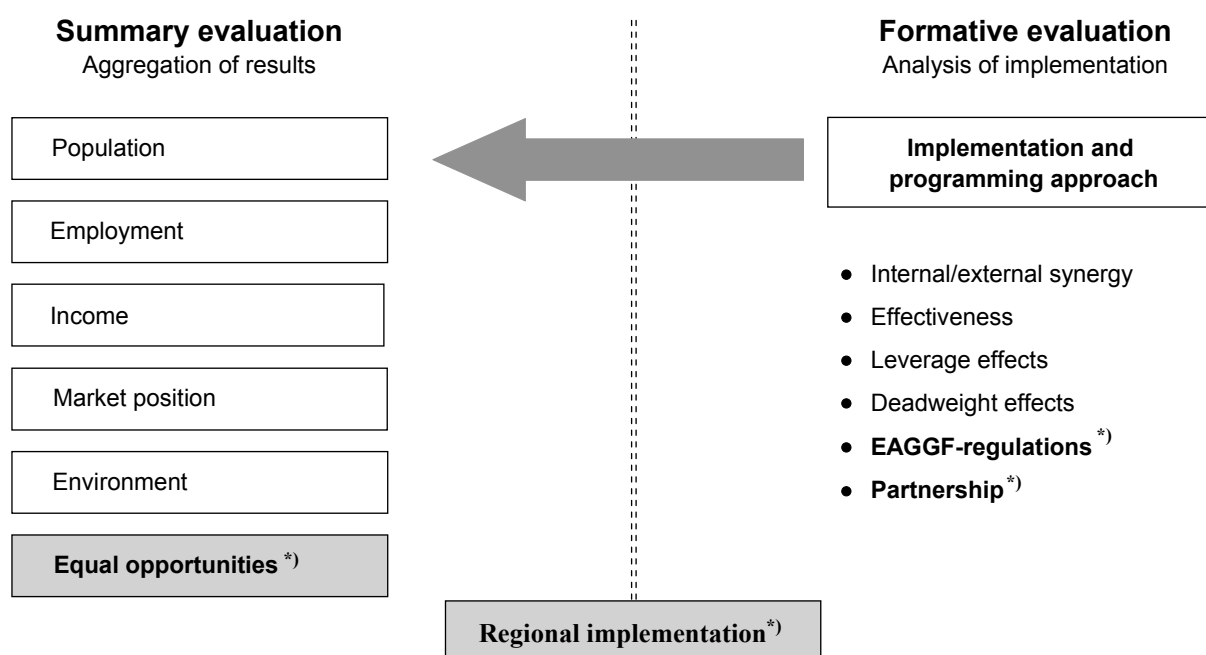
An evaluation will be carried out using the cross-cutting questions to evaluate the entire program, which was given an entirely new structure by the Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999. In the assessment of entire rural development programs, topics were chosen which are considered to be significant for agricultural or rural development processes from the perspective of the DG AGRI. These topic areas only partially cover the material basis determined by the cross-sectional questions to be studied for the structural funds programmes. (See Schwab & Toepel, 2000).

The cross-cutting evaluation questions selected by the EU Commission in its guidelines for evaluation with appropriate criteria and indicators are divided into two areas. One area deals

² Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Bremen, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Hessen.

with the thematic range of results of the chapter-specific evaluation and the significant positive as well as negative additional effects that are not intended in the framework of the conception of measures. One example are the employment effects of the agri-environmental measures not covered with the chapter-specific questions.

A further area deals with administrative implementation of programs. Here, in the framework of a formative evaluation, above all for the identification of implementation obstacles and adaptation possibilities that can be undertaken in the current program planning period. Also the question to be studied is whether the approach of the program planning actually led to an increase in value added in comparison to the measure-related approaches. Fig. 1 shows the relation between a summary and formative evaluation.



^{*)} additional aspects in the framework at the six-states-midterm evaluation

Fig. 1: Tasks of summary and formative program evaluation

Source: own concept

2.2 Organisation of the program evaluation

The range of contents of the development plans for rural areas requires a divided study approach in the evaluation. The cross-cutting questions intersect with the chapter-related questions so that the organisational structure of the evaluation must be adapted to the requirements of the evaluation grid. Fig. 2 illustrates the interrelation between chapter evaluation and program evaluation in terms of content and professional expertise (cross-cutting question team).

The determination of prerequisites and extensions for the chapter-specific surveys and the analysis of the carrying out on the program level are done centrally by the program evaluators. The survey of the impact areas (occupation, income, etc.) result out of the individual chapters, but are for the most part viewed with regard to funding chapters and aggregated accordingly at the program level.

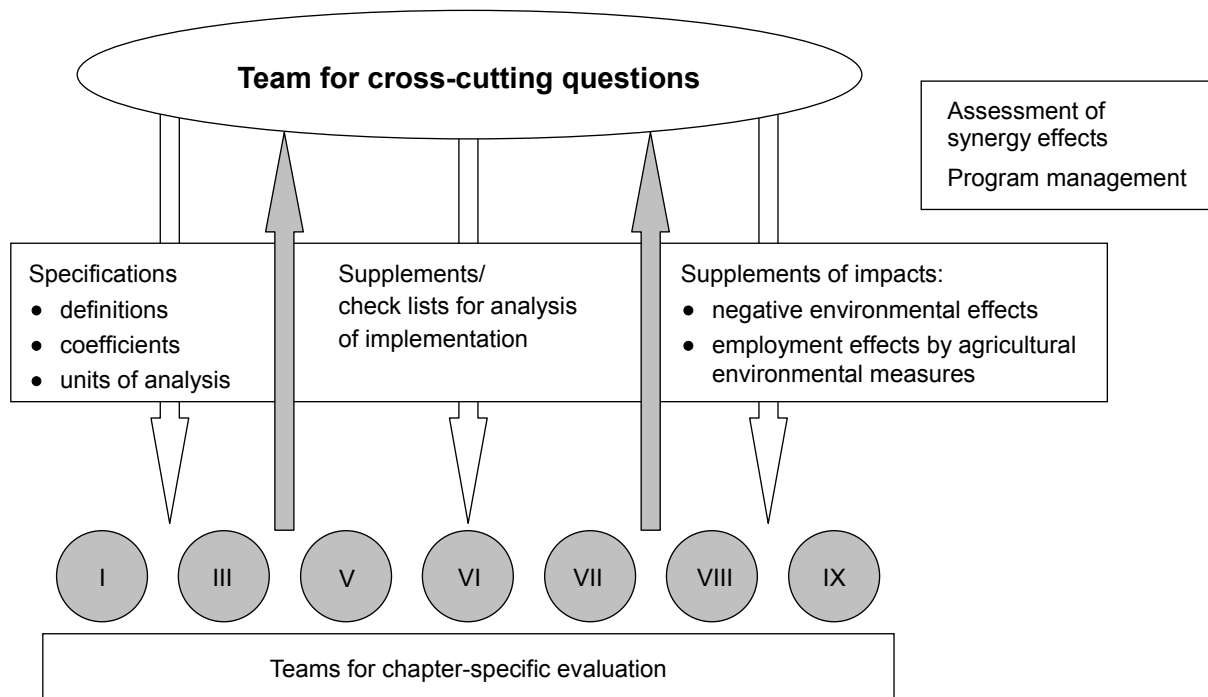


Fig. 2: Organisation and responsibilities for program evaluation

Source: own concept

2.3 Problems in the cross-cutting evaluation

In the cross-cutting evaluation, various problem areas can be defined, that on the one hand base on the question of basic coherence of rural development programs (joint strategies with resulting goals and measures) and on the other on the methodical problems in the appliance of the EU Commission evaluation grid.

2.3.1 Lack of coherence in rural development programmes

The evaluation grid of the EU Commission assumes a programme strategy with resulting goals and measures. This requires a study of strengths and weaknesses to identify problems in sectors or regions that are to be funded. This, in turn, requires that politicians have a coherent model of rural or sectorial development with all of its facets. In reality, the development of promotion programmes takes place in complex and parallel processes. Assuming specific interests on the part of political actors and the departments of a ministry are the goal from bottom up to top, meaning from the project level to measures and program level are developed and set (Schubert, 2002). There, the authority and financial resources must be considered, but also political influence with the intention of providing planning security and acceptance to the beneficiaries of promotional funding. The aggregated program level does not have its own lobby, and is only minimally considered in terms of the coherence of programming.

As a rule, the program strategy in the programs studied is specified in a general form, but only inadequately linked to the strength-weakness-analysis and based on according goals. The general lack of operational objectives at the program level and of promotional strategic aims makes it difficult to find appropriate measures to assess the value of the total program and its contribution from the individual measures. The cross-cutting evaluation questions of the EU Commission are not suited to this purpose since they are only inadequately integrated into the system of objectives at the measure level.

2.3.2 Problems of the evaluation method with the application of indicators

The current cross-cutting questions are very difficult to answer for a variety of methodical and content reasons.

The five thematic topics of the program evaluation according to the guidelines of the EU Commission only partially cover the same material as the chapter-specific questions. If this relationship is lacking, then the cross-cutting questions must be considered as an additional testing category in the evaluation of the individual measure. But appropriate criteria and indicators are missing.

Macro economic targets and indicators (reduction of unemployment numbers, changes in the GNP) are not measurable due to the marginal impacts of the program (overlapping with effects resulting from the total economic situation). Furthermore there is no operational model available to measure the effects of the very heterogeneous rural development measures in a single region. Methods based on macro economic models are thus not applicable. To evaluate the program one can only step back from the micro level on to the macro level by aggregation of individual results. There it must however be observed, that this linking of results is made extremely difficult through the different methods of implementing individual promotional chapters and various data bases.

A further problem is a one-sided quantitative implementation of the evaluation based on the given indicators (Schwab & Toepel, 2000). This stems from the desire to summarise the effects of existing approaches across Europe, but it is not adequate with regard to the multiple effects of the very heterogeneous rural development programs, since there are many effects which can either not be quantified or can only be quantified inadequately (improvement of quality of life, etc.). But even with indicators that appear easily quantifiable, in relation with direct impacts (income or occupational effects) the possible documentation levels that serve as the basis of the individual chapter-specific evaluations vary largely.

Through the concentration on quantifiable indicators, the situation exists that a formal comparability between differing evaluation reports – as intended by the EU Commission – can be established. With more exact analysis and the integration of information in the complex relations between effects the reliability and the comparability are not necessarily improved. Thus the danger exists that deceptive truths are produced (Toepel, 2000), P. 403). The creation of comparability is at the cost of reliable information in terms of content. Particularly regional political promotional measures create multiple effects that can frequently not be quantified or due to the narrow time range of the evaluation tasks can only be indicated in qualitative terms. Pressure to quantify the effects would seriously limit the scope and informative value of the evaluation.

The EU Commission insists on the documentation of net effects and not gross effects in its methodical guidelines for the evaluation. Possible dead-weight effects, displacement effects and substitution effects should be considered here. Appropriate methodical approaches for differentiation of gross and net effects are presented in the evaluation guidelines that are also described in the so-called MEANS³ Handbooks. At the forefront of the evaluation methods are, as described above, impact analyses with the help of a set of individual indicators. Such analyses are methodically based on surveys and case studies. On the basis of individual indicators information on the dead-weight-, displacement- and substitution effects can only be obtained in individual cases; this is also true for the multiplier effects. Here a cut-back must be made from the highly theoretical demands of a quantification of the net effects, because mostly only gross effects can be derived from data (Toepel, 2000). This holds even more true since it is difficult – if not impossible – to find appropriate comparison groups or regions for the majority of the measures. As far as it is not possible to calculate net effects on the level of measures and promotional chapters, this holds true for the program level as well.

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MEANS – Methods for Evaluating Action of Structural Nature. Handbooks created on behalf of the EU Commission for the methodical support of evaluation activities.

2.4 Analysis based on cross-cutting questions in the mid-term evaluation

Chronologically positioned between the ex ante evaluation and the ex post evaluation, the mid-term evaluation has, in accordance with its definition, the following main purpose: "The mid-term evaluation, while covering the evaluation questions, shall in particular examine the initial achievements, their relevance and consistency with the rural development plan and the extent to which the targets have been attained. It shall also assess the use made of financial resources and the operation of monitoring and implementation" (Article 44 (2) of the Reg. (EC) No. 1750/1999, EU-KOM 2002).

For the purpose of developing and applying the concept of cross-cutting questions in the framework of the mid-term evaluation the previously mentioned problem areas were taken into consideration. Primarily the evaluation at this stage of the assessment cycle serves at the program level to estimate the relevance of the evaluation questions and criteria as well as to derive further question and to some extent substitute inappropriate indicators. As a rule, only a description of changes and certain behaviour in reaction to new circumstances is adequate. This limitation is completely in accordance with the requirements of the MEANS Methods (EU KOM, 1999, p. 117). For this reason an approach with a predominantly qualitative approach was chosen.

2.4.1 The topic-related cross-cutting questions

With the intention to structure and elaborate the topic-related questions (see Fig. 1 above), the following steps were taken:

Relevance analysis

The single questions, criteria and indicators at the program level were tested in terms of their relevance based on a standardised survey, which was performed in collaboration with the chapter-related evaluators. The intention of this exercise was to show whether a basic relevance exists and in how far reliable results can be delivered at the mid-term evaluation.

Goal analysis at the programme level

In prepared tables primary and secondary goals were related to the cross-cutting questions by the chapter-related evaluations. This system of more general objectives and goals has been assigned to the specific targets at the level of individual measures. For measures, for which the setting of goals were too inadequate or inconsistent to be included into the goal structure at the program level, program specific goals were added⁴.

Analysis of socio-economic parameters by context indicators

An interpretation of the significant socio-economic indicators was performed on the basis of context analysis. It was carried out for the individual thematic questions in order to better classify the goals targeted with regard to their relevance.

Standardisation of information and check lists for the surveys and questionnaires prepared by chapter evaluators

Several preconditions have been set in order to improve the comparability and completeness of impact assessment with respect to the presentation of results. Here the principle of commensurability was taken into account. Each additional aspect expands the study design in the individual chapters, but is not necessarily relevant for the assigned questions of the individual chapters. Despite efforts to standardise survey methods and indicators, due to the differing data bases and the heterogeneity of measures, a comparability of the indicators extracted from the chapters could only be achieved to a limited extent. Thus for many cross-

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Thus, for example, a topic like coastal protection, which is of great importance in some states, could only be inadequately integrated in the question system at the program level.

cutting indicators no reliable quantification can be undertaken at this stage of evaluation. But it is also questionable if this can take place later in the framework of the ex-post evaluation.

Impact flow analysis

With the methodology of the "Impact Flow Analysis" as a departure point, which was already used in the framework of many evaluation studies (ECOTEC, 1998; IfS, 2000), the above mentioned five cross-cutting questions were taken as the main area of impact assessment. They were classified in terms of impacts at the measure level with a qualitative distinction regarding the direction and degree of result and/or effectiveness. By this way of impact assessment it was intended to estimate the relative importance of the targeted output for an individual measure in relation to the actual course of promotion schemes during the program implementation. Based on this classification at the program level, a scalable overview of the program impacts related to a single cross-cutting question is given. Within the range of a certain measure only a part of the project with positive or negative direction can be taken into consideration. Due to this fact, the estimated (positive or negative) levels of effectiveness of the measures were related to the actual amount of committed funds assigned to projects and single measures for the reason of aggregation up to the program level. In other words: for a simplified illustration of impact appraisal of the program, quantitative weight was placed on the qualitative classification of effects through linking with actual funding of each measure.

With the help of the Impact Flow Analysis, the following questions can be answered:

- which measures are targeted at which goals?
- How large are the proportions of the budget to which particular effects are linked?
- Which effects are achieved with which measures?
- Which goals and intended actions of the EU COM are seldom or not considered?

Two significant limits are indicated for this method:

- Due to the simplifying character of this method the results are to be understood as tendencies or a possible range for impacts. For instance, by the financial weightings the assumptions were made, that one Euro of funding had exactly the same effect in all types of measures.
- The estimation on the level of individual measures is based on a largely varying data basis accompanied with differing data quality and number of promotional cases. While in some support areas, i.e. village renewal, statistically useful data can be found, the state of knowledge in other areas like investment support for food processing and marketing has not been improved compared to the ex ante status.

The comparability of the statements in the vertical direction is thus extremely limited. This problem will probably be reduced during the further course of the programming period.

2.4.2 Evaluation of the implementation of the programming approach

In the final cross-cutting question it has to be indicated to what extent the arrangements for implementation contribute to a maximum of intended effects of the entire programme. With the exception of synergy effects, the topics which are to be dealt with here are more relevant in terms of evaluation of measures and less relevant with regard to the program level. Accordingly, only the results of the single chapters can be aggregated to the total program. Significant aspects which could have a determining impact on the implementation of the program are missing in the EU Commission evaluation grid. These include the rules for the EAGGF-guarantee section, which are the basis for co-financing and implementing of all rural development measures since 2000 in accordance with Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999.

2.4.3 Regional Implementation of the Program

The promotion of rural areas is basically characterised by a so-called "horizontal", the entire area of a member state covering approach. With the exception of the promotion in less fa-

voured areas and in measures of contractual natural protection, no selective areas are delineated at the program level. But even so the funds are distributed differently in space. In the mid-term evaluation, therefore an analysis of the financial flows in individual counties of the program region has been carried out with a distinction between subprograms of promotion. In further analysis steps it was attempted to identify determining factors for the regional differentiation.

3 Results of the mid term evaluation at the program level

The available results of the mid term evaluations are presented in the following only as an example for demonstration of the evaluation approach at the program level. The main emphasis is put on the rural development program of Lower Saxony called PROLAND (Grajewski et al., 2003).

3.1 Financial weighting by support priorities

The Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 do not determine whether all promotion chapters are to be provided by the development documents and how the available funds should be allocated to the individual chapters of promotion. Only the agrarian environmental measures are an integral component of each development plan. Fig. 3 represents the distribution of the public means according to three subprograms for promotion in the six examined states (Laender) of the Federal Republic of Germany. The subprogram "competitiveness of agriculture" includes measures like farm investment support and compensatory allowance in less favoured areas. The subprogram "rural development" contains essentially the measures according to Article 33 or chapter 9 of the EC-regulation, thus the consolidation of farmland, renewal of villages and the construction of rural roads. Under the promotion of "environmental improvements" are the agrarian environmental measures subsumed, but also measures for nature protection and landscape conservation and support of forest renewal as well as new afforestation.

The six examined states set different emphasis in the arrangement of their preferred promotion schemes. Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony promote more strongly rural infrastructure investments, while the other development programs exhibit a predominant sectorial approach. Accordingly, it has to be considered that promotion of the environment concerns also to a large extent support of agricultural enterprises.

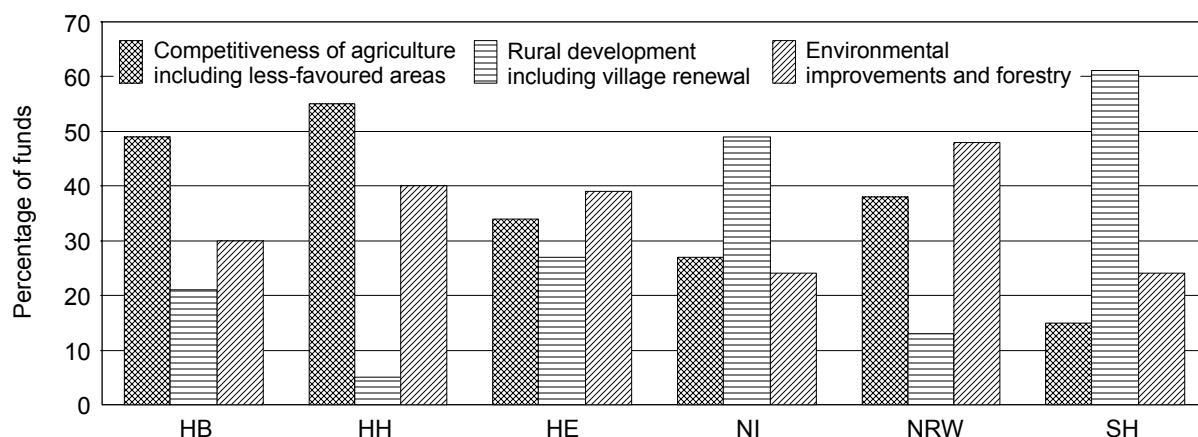


Fig. 3: Scheduled public funds by subprograms 2000-2006

Source: applications for program adjustments of the six states

On the one hand, the difference in preferred settings of the programs is due to different program strategies, but on the other hand it is also related to financial conditions of the programming approach. The measures of the promotion of "environmental improvement" for instance are mostly co-financed by federal and state support schemes, whereas in the promotion of "rural development" also municipal means can be used for co-financing. This possibility opens a large degree of flexibility for financial arrangements on the program level with

the result, that in the first years of programming many financial means were shifted into this last named priority of promotion.

3.2 Regional distribution of funds and its determining factors

How support funds are distributed with respect to the regional dimension, will be demonstrated by the example of the rural development program of Lower Saxony. In chart 1 a clear regional differentiation is recognisable. Basically, this observation is attributed to three reasons, which could be mutually strengthened in their effects:

Contents of promotion

On the one hand, the promotion scheme “competitiveness of agriculture” is strongly oriented to the structure of the animal husbandry (dairy farms), which is mainly located on the grassland in the west and locations of the food processing and marketing enterprises, which are aligned to the agricultural main production areas. Hence, these promotion activities are concentrated in the west of the state of Lower Saxony. The agrarian environmental measures (promotion subprogram III) however are less strongly spatially concentrated due to their various structures of measure.

Conditions of co-financing

In the promotion scheme “measures for rural development”, which is characterised by a high degree of public means of support, the spatial distribution of funds is strongly related to the different possibilities of the municipalities with regard to the provision of the necessary co-financing of means for projects. Due to the financial scarcities of the state budget and a lower tax burden of certain rural counties in the eastern part of the country they are increasingly withdrawing from the co-financing schemes. Therefore, by the requirement to provide the appropriate co-financing the better positioned and wealthier municipalities, which are located more in the western part of the state, are preferred by the existing delivery system of support.

Experience with support schemes

The straight west of Lower Saxony, which is also congruent with the main part of the former Objective 5b area, has a long experience in the acquisition of funds from the European Union. The implementation of measures of the European structural policy encounters here well functioning institutions and structures for co-operative actions between the different levels of regional administration and private organisations.

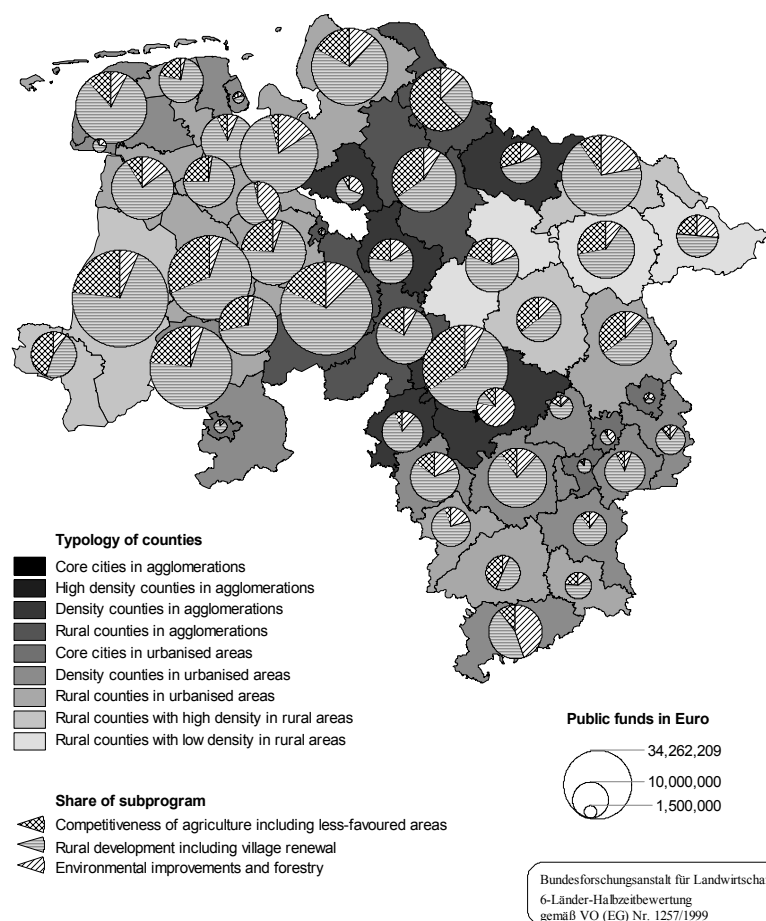


Chart 1: Regional distribution of public funds by subprograms in Lower Saxony 2000-2006

Source: budget data of Lower Saxony for EU budget years 2000, 2001 and 2002; BBR (2002); own calculations

Basically, it can be stated that due to the necessary co-financing rate of 50 % of public expenditures to be provided by the local administrative bodies, in the framework of "measures for rural development" a reasonable reduction of regional disparities is prevented because of a too small tax base of the poorer municipalities.

A stronger regional differentiation of financial means, e.g. in the framework of the promotion of "measures for rural development" would have been possible in principle under the conditions of the Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999, as it has already been put on practices in other states of Germany, for instance in Hessen. Related to the contents of promotion there should be in our opinion in the future a stronger consideration of non-agricultural fields of promotion, since in the less well developed regions an agricultural oriented promotion will hardly initiate the required stimulus for development due to the small meaning of agriculture. Therefore the EU Commission would have to widen the scope of promotion possibilities of the article 33 of the regulation for rural development considerably, in order to provide new perspectives for less developed rural areas with a decreasing importance of agriculture.

3.3 Program-related impacts in Lower Saxony

The representation of the thematic topics of the cross-cutting questions is essentially based on an analysis of goals and effects with a strong qualitative point of view. At the current time of the programming cycle, at which results and effects have partly still a provisional character, this form of the presentation is appropriate. If one connects the directions of action with the program means used in each support scheme and measure (altogether 526 millions Euro public expenditures committed in the program of Lower Saxony during the years 2000 to 2002), then the main direction of implemented actions becomes obvious with an emphasis related to the agricultural sector on the promotion of "environmental improvements" on the one hand and "improvements of income" on the other hand. So far, the aspect of employ-

ment improvements is not yet to be recognised as a sizeable focus of promotion. Until recently, any relevant job-creating effects have been affected by unfavourable conditions on the local labour markets with high rates of unemployment. A positive employment impact can be recognised only corresponding to a small fraction of the assigned means (approximately 14 % in Lower Saxony). The unfavourable basic conditions for the regional economy contribute crucially to the fact that too little durable possibilities of employment were created.

The cross-cutting question on the topic of "Population" has been modified in the study of the six states of Germany. It was replaced by a question about the contribution of the programs towards the improvement of the quality of life, which seems to be more relevant under the German contextual conditions for rural development than any loss of population by out-migration (see Fig. 4). The different lines per cross-cutting question in Fig. 4 correspond to the sub-criteria, which have been set in the guidelines for program evaluation by the EU Commission (EU-KOM, 2000).

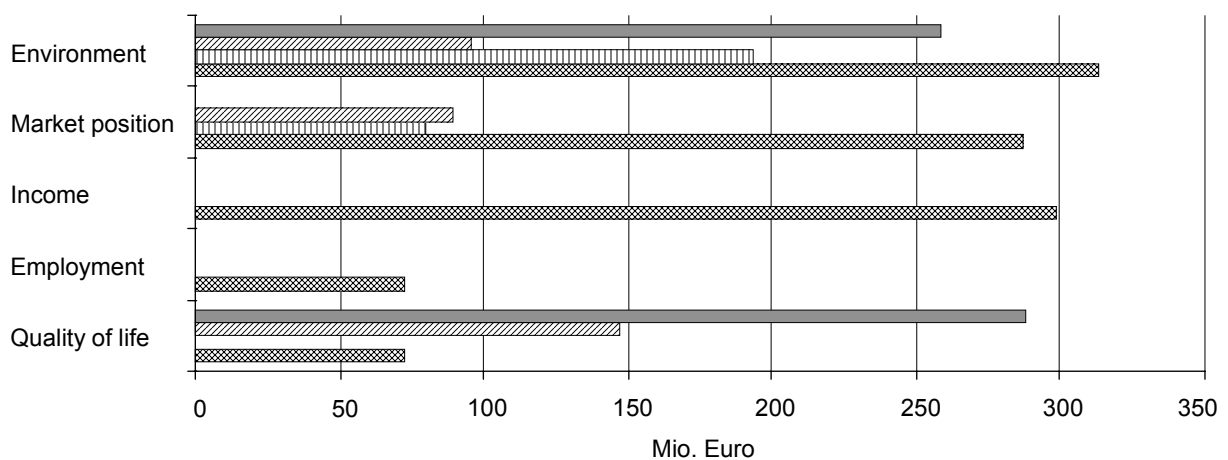


Fig. 4: Positive program impacts weighted by funds in Lower Saxony

Source: Grajewski et al.; 2003

The principal purpose of the development strategy aims at the stabilisation of the economic competitiveness and the ecological functions of rural areas. Considering the limitations of the selected method for the researching the five topics of the cross-cutting questions, it can be derived from the results that in the future a stronger weight should be given to economic activities only partly related to agriculture, but mainly out-side the agricultural sector with corresponding prospects of employment. Here are certain content-specific defaults of the Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 and their interpretation by the authorities of the European Union Commission partially an obstacle, because so far they call for a clearly agricultural development approach. Until recently, many program impacts, which are rather of a central importance in a medium and long-term range of the development strategy, were not yet detectable, so that altogether the informative basis of the results is rather limited with regard to impact assessment.

3.4 Program implementation

An emphasis in the framework of the mid-term evaluation was on the analysis of the effects, which resulted from an application of the regulations by the EAGGF-Guarantee section with regard to the implementation of the rural development measures. All measures in the six examined programs of the German states were categorised and divided in four groups:

1. measures, already before 2000 co-financed by the EAGGF-Guarantee section,
2. measures, already before 2000 existing, which were co-financed however by the EAGGF-Guidance section,
3. measures, already before 2000 existing, but only financed from federal and state support schemes by administrations with only limited experience with EU policy,

4. new measures.

In the centre of the program analysis, questions were formulated about the regulations according to the EAGGF-Guarantee section and their impacts on the usage of measures and on their content-specific arrangements for delivery and implementation. In addition, written questionnaires covering final beneficiaries of support as well as staff members from administrations responsible for allowances were conducted, and furthermore experts' meetings with authorities from different administrative levels, e.g. the EU, the national, the state and the regional level of administration, were accomplished.

The problems, which are connected with the general application of the regulations according to the EAGGF-Guarantee section, have been discussed with regard to all measures of the rural development programs on the basis the following criteria:

1. financial regulations (e.g. principle of annuality in terms of the budget) as well as
2. specifications for administration and inspection including the role of sanctions.

The EU Commission refers in its paper for simplification to the fact that "the complexity during the implementation of the measures for the promotion of rural development at the Community level [...], is to be seen in connection with the already existing complex structure of the national regulations, competencies and responsibilities, which can be very different in structure and application depending upon member state" (EU-KOM, 2002).

The results are different depending upon the situation in the examined German states. The effects, which are attributed to the implementation of a program by financial regulations, are depending on the flexibility of the programming procedures. Determinants for a flexible guidance of the programming are for example:

1. availability of additional co-financing funds from the state budget,
2. use of funds from the municipalities in addition to the national co-financing scheme.

Basically, those states of Germany, which offer homogeneous measures without support of the European Union (so-called article-52-measures) in addition to measures, which are co-financed by the EU, have the possibility of a more flexible implementation of programs. Such state-financed measures can be transferred into the EU co-financing scheme, depending upon need, if there are obstacles in other sections of the program for a timely implementation of measures to the intended extent. Especially, Lower Saxony has profited so far from the principle of annuality by taking up additional means from other German states or EU member states, because it has extensive funds availability for measures according to Article-52 in the sub-program "measures for rural development". Thus, the program structure has been shifted to the advantage of the promotion scheme "measures for rural development".

The regulations and common rules for administration, control and sanctions are subject to a critical review in detail and require frequently a revision by the European Union. However on the whole, the responsible regional authorities and their administrations have come to an arrangement with the administrative and control mechanisms after initial difficulties. The higher working load resulting from complicated procedures is problematic with equal lasting or decreasing personnel capabilities for monitoring and administration of the programs. In particular smaller measures are affected by the complexity of programming, as far as separate management systems for decision making are concerned. Independently of the financial volume of the program a complex administrative and control system must be established also for such small measures. For this reason the state of Hessen has decided to dispense some smaller measures of the EU program and to finance them in future by purely state-financed sources, e.g. support for viticulture in steep locations, promotion of domestic animal races threatened by becoming extinct and vocational training for farmers.

Many of the indicated problems could be solved without changing the requirement of a uniform EU-framework of regulations, if both financial regulations as well as rules for administration, control and sanction mechanisms of programs would take more strongly into account the variability of measures and differences between the approach of the "second pillar"

(structural adjustment in rural areas) in comparison to the "first pillar" (support for regulation of agricultural markets).

4 Conclusions

4.1 Evaluation approach

In principle, the five thematic cross-cutting questions at the program level are assessed as relevant in the context of the six mid-term evaluations. Most of the indicators are quantitatively difficult to determine. Already at the level of the evaluations of single chapters of the program there are various problems existing with the determination of the intended indicators. Even if the provided indicators can be determined, the informative capability depends on the underlying assumptions. This problem is reinforced by aggregation of the different results from chapter-related assessments on the summary level of the program. Just at the time of the mid-term evaluation the main focus should be concentrated on a systematic evaluation of the entire program (Karl, 2004). Basically, it should be examined whether the selected program approach, the provided mix of measures and the modalities of the delivery system are suitable to obtain the intended effects. Both the objectives of the programs and the higher-ranking goals of the Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 should be taken into consideration with regard to the five cross-cutting questions of the evaluation approach.

It is difficult also for the ex-post evaluation to determine for the various measures empirically quantifiable and viable economic effects. This applies for example to the promotion of investments, for which at the time of the ex-post evaluation only to a certain degree tangible effects can be provided based on record keeping results. Also the intended effects due to improvements of rural infrastructure are rather characterised by a long-term time horizon. On the other side, if the termination for ex-post evaluation is dated even more in distance to the program end however, a summarising view of all effects of a program will become more difficult or almost irrelevant for policy decisions.

It could be meaningful in this regard to limit or completely abandon the requirement of a program-referred analysis in terms of all conceivable effects. During the policy cycle of the programming approach the evaluation of the entire program-system should stand in the foreground with assessment of partly preliminary program effects. Related to the chapter-specific questions a thematic evaluation with a focus on the main impacts is indicated, whereas a predominantly qualitative assessment approach is rather appropriate with regard to the summary evaluation of the program. Such a systematic evaluation should be supplemented by selected topics of thematic evaluations, which can be accomplished independently of the respective policy and program cycles. Thus basic results could better be provided with respect to selected aspects of policy design and qualified rules for delivery and implementation. These selective arrangements of evaluation would also facilitate to analyse and compare more in depth the various instruments of a complex rural development program with regard to effectiveness and efficiency.

4.2 Policy approach

The policy approach for the development of rural areas, which existed beforehand in separate sectorial policies and/or in multi-fund programs like according to Objective 5b of the EU structural funds (Schrader, 1994), was summarised and integrated in the so-called "second pillar" of the agricultural policy during the course of the agenda 2000. From the point of view of the trade policy, the policy for rural development is subject to the requirements of the trade agreements to offer "green-box" compatible measures according to rules of international trade policy. In the context of the agenda 2000 a part of the measure spectrum of the Reg. (EC) No. 1257/1999 is still integrated into the regional "cohesion" policy of the European Union, whereas a part of the EAGGF-measures in combination with ERDF and ESF co-financed measures is assigned Objective 1 areas. Probably in the future this linkage will be prevented by establishing a single fund for land development (rural fund). Thereby, the policy for rural areas seem to evolves more and more back to a traditional sector-oriented approach

instead of a territorial strategy of diversification (Saraceno, 2003). The consequence of this tendency could be, that the regional policy of "economic and social cohesion" and the convergence criteria as arguments of an objective function for policy evaluation will step into the background.

Since the EU Commission sets only the general framework, it is essential how far and in which form the regional planning authorities, e.g. the states in Germany, will fill this framework. So far, here are clear differences to be observed. Some German states set priorities more in concordance and analogy with the former Objective 5b-programs. Other states of our study sample pursue a particularly sector-oriented development approach. With scarce public funds and under the pressure of a mandatory policy of so-called "modulation" of the agrarian promotion scheme, which means a reduction of the available funds of the "first pillar", the pressure will still increase with the aim to use the "second pillar" as a refinancing instrument for support of the agrarian sector. This reorientation of the emphasis of a rural development strategy towards agriculture would be particularly problematic for the new acceding European countries with their weaknesses of the infrastructure in rural areas.

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