How resilience thinking contributes to a more sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas: a first appraisal of case studies in 14 countries

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In this paper we want to explore how resilience thinking contributes to research and practice aimed at a more sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas. We do this at a time when the agricultural sector must respond to increasing resource scarcity and distributional demands. The starting point for the analysis are the (potential) connections between the development of agriculture and the wider societal and policy goal of vibrant and prosperous rural areas. Our assumption is that the kind of transformation needed in the economies, production systems and lifestyles of the industrialized world has changed a lot during the last decades. We argue that competitiveness and growth are parameters that need to be overcome, and that policy and agricultural sciences have to change much faster in order meet future demands as well as societal expectations.

The analysis is grounded in a social and ecological systems framework. The basis for the analysis is a first appraisal of the case study profiles and additional information from 14 countries (including Turkey and Israel). The key question asked is how resilience thinking has actually been operationalized and applied in the 14 case studies, i.e. in very different situations and processes of change. Agriculture is particularly suitable for an application of resilience thinking because of the close links between social and ecological 'systems' and its enormous diversity.

In a comparative analysis it will be tried to identify communalities as well as differences in the operationalization and application of resilience thinking. Focus will be on key parameters, interrelationships, feedback loops and process features. At the same time we will try to identify those areas where a more integrative view of sustainable development and transformation might first be recognized. Adaptive capacity and knowledge integration might be such an area. The paper is based on some of the key ideas and first data from the RETHINK project "Rethinking the links between farm modernization, rural development and resilience". The project is jointly funded under the RURAGRI ERA-Net by the European Commission and the funding bodies in the 14 countries involved. Other colleagues from the project would be involved in the elaboration of the paper.

Brief bibliography


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