

ODGOVORNOST KOT KONSTITUTIVNI ELEMENT TRAJNOSTI – PRIMER AGRARNIH SKUPNOSTI

Nevenka Bogataj, PhD.

Andragoški center Slovenije, Šmartinska 134a, 1000 Ljubljana /
Slovenian Institute for Adult Education
nevenka.bogataj@acs.si

Povzetek: Koncept trajnosti vključuje individualno in skupno odgovornost do virov in med ljudmi. Splošno je predstavljen primer tradicionalnega upravljanja virov, ki ga v Sloveniji slabo poznamo. Primer prispeva k utemeljitvi pomena ne-individualnih entitet. Strukturno in funkcionalno vključevanje dialoga in izkušnjskega znanja/veščin v delovanje agrarnih skupnosti je pomembno tudi za koncept Integralne zelene ekonomije. Stoletja potranjevanja skupnostnih pravil so namreč v tem primeru oblikovalo normo odgovornosti do skupnosti in njenih virov.

Ključne besede: trajnost, upravljanje z viri, agrarne skupnosti, Slovenija, integralna zelena ekonomija

RESPONSIBILITY AS A CONSTITUTIONAL ELEMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY – THE CASE OF COMMONS

Abstract: Sustainability conceptualisation incorporates individual and shared responsibility to resources and among people. A general presentation of a traditional resource management case, poorly known in Slovenia, is given. It contributes to argumentation of non-individual entities' importance. Structural and functional incorporation of the dialogue and experiential knowledge/skills into Commons is also important for the concept of Integral Green Economy. Centuries long internalisation of rules in this case resulted in the norm of responsibility to the social setting and its resource base.

Keywords: Sustainability, resource management, Commons, Slovenia, Integral Green Economy

INTRODUCTION

Social-knowledge based economy calls for life-long attitude of dialogue and learning. Two types of dialogue are considered here – the dialogue among people and the one with the natural environment. The latter may be understood as old-fashioned as it rises out of direct and full dependence from nature, which generally does not characterise the recent Slovenian society or most of the European ones nor its goal. However, its value based behaviours (fragmentally) remained in the focus of the following presentation in terms of innovative potential of social organisation which incorporates responsibility.

As innovation is publicly usually regarded in technical terms, new perspectives and roles of existing practices are neglected. However, European society has a long tradition, so plenty of organisational forms may be observed, one of them being particularly frequent in the areas with poor natural conditions.

Tradition of Farmers Commons throughout Europe (Bravo and De Moor, 2008) is particularly rich in Alpine area (Netting, 1976, Merlo et al., 1989 and others) including Slovenia (Petek and Urbanc, 2007, Bogataj et. al., 2012) where only one third survived decades long period of external political pressures, frequent market reorientations and loosening of ties with the nature for the sake of urbanisation, industrialisation and individualisation, based on material development of the last century (Bogataj, Krč, 2014).

THE MAIN FEATURES AND TRENDS

Definition

A Common consists of individuals, but it is not their simple sum but a particular entity, defined by ties, norms, regulative rules and time horizon (history, vision). Their essential element is public welfare provision along with individual profits (e.g. infrastructure investment and maintenance). Common is regarded an institution, a user of common land but also a regime/organization of community, characterised by particular communicative patterns of local inhabitants, based on democratic, cooperative and efficient functioning and nesting. The primary unit is household (not an individual).

Nearly a dozen diverse terms were found in Slovenia for the same entity, indicating Roman, German and original historical impact. However, they all characterise the same functional non-individual unit: »... shareholders of common property, rooted in history – once a pasture, today a forest – following traditional procedures of maintaining and expressing pride for having a chance of active involvement and a common good contribution«.

The basic overview and evolution

An insight into several European cases (Bravo and De Moor, 2008, Chobotova and Kluvankova-Oravska, 2011; Schusser et al., 2013) provides information on common ownership and management of scarce natural resources. It is usually interpreted as a strategy of community to cope with extreme living conditions.

The origin is attributed to medieval times and influence of German culture (Brandl, 2011). Six centuries of their relative independence are based on production and trade of timber and dairy products. Communities negotiated their independence with diverse authorities in the Alpine area until the fall of the Republic of Venice (1797), but for the rests of Slovenia until the fall of Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the feudal period (1848). Napoleon's centralisation followed at the beginning of 19th century transferring decision-making powers from the communities to the municipalities. Political conflicts of WWI (with large battle-line over the western Slovenia), trials of organisation in the kingdom and (short) monarchy period; and WWII resulted in "iron curtain" establishment in the west part of Slovenia. The Federal Socialistic Republic of Yugoslavia abolished Commons and nationalised their land by entitling them "general public property". A positive turning point opened their revival potential in the second half of the 20th century, facing communities and their (denationalised) land with absenteeism from public discourse, organisational marginalisation, lack of data and thus State support, the impact of migrations and social changes. Only one third survived, coping with internal revival, and legislative barriers.

Institutional consolidation possible in medieval times and recently in a quasi-democratic state regime still promoting individualisation is opposite than two hundred years of diverse authoritarian States, frequent major political disruptions affecting internal functioning and external recognition. Decades long divergence of "west" and "east" model of national States is now facing a challenge of overcoming their negative externalities and keeping positive ones at the same time.

The state of Art

Commons cover 3.6 % of the country's forest cover. There are 638 Commons registered and several non-registered (MKO, 2013). Their size varies (1-2500 ha), in average 150 ha and is managed by 3-513 shareholders.

Dialogue in a community (horizontal ties)

Communities have always "created a meaning" through a communicative process. Smaller settlements were more successful in self-organisation but this process was weakened by emigration waves due to economic fall downs, ideologies of national or class-based origin and material welfare rise. But the old tradition of regular official yearly meetings and leadership election remains and so are the two crucial bodies: the management committee and the yearly assembly. Resource based typology of Slovenian commons indicates that the pasture-based ones meet more frequently and have historically been less excluded from resource management than the forest-based ones. Consequently the horizontal ties of the latter may be weaker (Premrl et al., in press). A just distribution of a common resource was and still is crucial but is hampered by legislation, which does not fully recognise internal rules and damages them by inheritance rules (causing raised number of members), disregarding the difference btw active and in-members (causing non-participation) and disregarding obligations of visitors due to free access (leaving out resource protection). Top-down driven equality thus seems to ruin internal balances, also based on equality rules, but strictly monitoring two balances – in the community and with the resource. From this perspective the recent dissolution of shared duties (of all members and additional resource users) is a challenge.

Dialogue of community with external "world" (vertical ties)

The culture of common management has been severely interrupted at least seven times in roughly 200 years because political and economic changes were reoccurring nearly every 30 to 40 years. Documentation shortages were therefore not a surprise, so oral sources gained weight.

Historically, opening of community to new economic opportunities brought more insight into economic alternatives and other community rules. Additionally, aging of communities has weakened vertical communication. Inheritance (and commons) legislation has already been mentioned; so several communities face the problem of rise of the number of participants and conflicts btw active (usually local) and non-active (usually non-local heirs) members. Past strategies are not enough, so adaptations are taking place (e.g. participants are asked to buy shares from each other).

Forcing to register shares and thus become co-owners (and start paying a tax) is interpreted sometimes as an expected procedure and sometimes with criticism. Seven changes of the Act (1994) prove lively activity in the nineties. Vertical social capital is under the impact of previous negative experience. Active individuals are sometimes deemed to have a motive of their personal benefit instead of the common good.

Dialogue with the nature as its resource

Awareness of the benefits of the state(s) afforestation in the past exists, but recent relation to the state is usually criticised in particular from the perspective of the resource use and protection (»They do not recognise that we got it as a gift, and will do our best to prolong it, so tax is not justified, or could only be paid on the added value« (Pers. comm. 2, 2011).

However, most registered Slovenian cases are of Alpine character (88%) having particular careful relationship towards resource ("You cannot sell a gift (given to You by Your ancestors)", "You have to – at least – keep what has been given and try to upgrade but never make it smaller/weaker...". Smaller communities recognised »free riders« more successfully and do not regard them a problem, which is usually the case of higher levels of organisation (due to inability or high transaction costs).

DISCUSSION

Communal Knowledge Creation – Gained, Lost and Regained:

The rationale behind the formation of the Commons might have been the need for the survival of the local community, from which the most effective social organization ensued. This process is based on constant oral communication, adjusted to the local natural environment, and its oscillations. Adaptive knowledge and skills are thus crucial in both terms - adjustments to the needs of community (and its members) and in term of adjustments to the state of resource pulsing, e.g. due to seasonal natural cycling and risk of disasters (droughts, floods, landslides, etc.).

Political and economic changes both inhibited and enhanced the culture of commons as a survival strategy, opposition to (changing) regimes, remnant of history etc. Consequently, new knowledge and skills were needed. Scarce analyses indicate that this culture is mostly learnt at home or by "important others" (and not implemented by institutions). However, recently, with the advent of climate change, loss of biodiversity and other such indicators, some of commons related competences are needed again, as wisdom of organizational principles became more relevant. On the other hand several skills are vanishing due to urbanised expectations and lifestyles.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the commons is endangered due to diversified expectations of their members (the shift from communal subsistence into profit seek). This means there has been a change from investment into common goals into the opposite trend, individualization of profits on expense of common resources (the natural, social and human ones). Secondly, dry pastures and meadows have been overtaken by forest land, so despite raised level of the natural resource its significance declined as fossil fuels took place and income alternatives are available. Recent trends are opposite; so traditional cooperative patterns gain interest and have become a key to long-term resource management of local communities.

Sustainable management practice, developed in specific environmental and social circumstances in general can be understood as contradicting the Hardin's tragedy. Balancing of ecological, social, and economic goals on the local level does not leave forests unmanaged. However, sustainable practice is in line with the Forest Act

implemented by Slovenian Forest Service as one of the state's trustworthy entities, but up to now not advocating to stop division of common properties.

CONCLUSIONS

Commons historically played a crucial role in the maintenance of the sustainable management of natural resources. Different kinds of changes are challenging traditional patterns of functioning and face policy arenas, global markets and media transmitted information. Traditional resource management culture is not providing survival base but still exists. Commons, at least in Slovenia, provide benefits to all, even non-members of the Commons. This is understood as a social responsibility.

A time dimension is regarded essential. The revival of Slovenian Commons with Slovenia's independence is therefore seen as a new developmental wave, logically coping with several challenges. Initiatives represent the active part while there is also a passive one and – not less than two thirds are the lost entities. However, in those, remained internal relationships and norms of community revive, recreate, and adjust to new circumstances. The crucial message and lesson of Commons may thus lie in accepting a variety of specific local patterns of social balancing between nature and society and recognition of their organisational models as worth studying and understanding as an entity incorporating lots of responsibility types.

From the perspective of Integral Green Slovenia the value and potential of Slovenian Commons is their:

1. Basic value in extremely rationalised considering of natural resources with careful adjusting of their use to their self-regeneration ability (e.g. Alpine steep slopes and harsh climate or Dinaric droughts). This is the base of self-sufficiency on the level of survival (not profit). This basis thus incorporates lots of observation and response to observations – learning in its very essence.
2. Communal setting and communicative pattern.
3. Cultural variety (represented in terminology, local specifics, flow of experience and knowledge).
4. Nesting of communities into higher levels (household – common - aggregations of commons e.g. association).
5. Internalisation of rules into norm of responsibility
 - a. Among participants,
 - b. Towards a resource.

LITERATURE

- Bogataj, N., Šebalj Mikše, Š., Mlekuž, I., Krč, J. 2012. Slovenian forest commons - cases of collective resource management. In: Selter, B. (Ed.), *Forest Commons - Role Model for Sustainable Local Governance and Forest Management*. Booklet 22 of the State Forestry Administration series North Rhine-Westphalia, pp. 30-34.
- Brandl, H. 2011. The commons in south west Germany: prosperity, decline and transformation. IUFRO International Conference on Small Scale Forestry: Synergies and Conflicts in Social, Ecological and Economic Interactions, Freiburg, Germany. July 2011.
- Bravo, G., De Moor T. 2008. The commons in Europe: from past to future. *International Journal of the Commons*, 2, 2, 155-161.
- Chobotová, V., Kluvánková-Oravská, T. 2011. Robustness, vulnerability and adaptive capacity of long surviving traditional forestry institutions. Case study of community management in Slovakia. *Prognostické práce*, 3, 405-420. URL: <http://www.earthssystemgovernance.org/lund2012/LC2012-paper52.pdf> [accessed Jan 24, 2014].
- Merlo, M., Morandini, R., Gabrielli, A., Novaco, I. 1989. Collective forest land tenure and rural development in Italy, Selected case studies. FAO Library AN: 310197.
- MKO (Ministrstvo za kmetijstvo in okolje). 2013. Predlog zakona o agrarnih skupnosti, verzija 24. 12. 2013, 22 s.
- Netting, R. M. 1976. What Alpine peasants have in common: Observations on communal tenure in a Swiss village. *Human Ecology*, 4, 2, 135-146.
- Petek, F., Urbanc, M., 2007, Skupna zemljišča v Sloveniji. *Geografski vestnik*, 79, 2, 41-62.

Premrl, T., Udovč, A., Bogataj, N., Krč, J.. 2015. From restitution to revival: A case of commons re-establishment and restitution in Slovenia, *Forest Policy and Economics* (in press)

Schusser, C., Krott, M., Logmani, J. 2013. The applicability of the German community forestry model to developing countries. *Forstarchiv*, 84, 24-29, doi 10.4432/0300-4112-84-24.