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The resources and channels of influence of farmers' associations - evidence from Poland

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the existing studies on interest groups' influence on agricultural policies. The article uses a survey conducted with leaders and members of farmers' associations to assess the tangible and intangible resources of these organizations in Poland, as well as the channels they use to influence agricultural policy. The results show that farmers' associations in Poland may influence agricultural policy only to a small degree. This results from their insufficient resources, especially those that are useful for politicians (e.g. expert knowledge). The second obstacle stems from the lack of unity and cooperation between these associations.

Key words: farmers' associations, tangible and intangible resources, channels of influence, agricultural policy, Poland

1. Introduction

The influence of interest groups on the formulation and implementation of agricultural policy is often analyzed in the literature. For example, such an approach is used to explain the differences in the pattern of protection in rich and poor countries (Anderson, 1995), as well as the design of the Common Agricultural Policy (e.g., Pappi, Henning, 1999). Researchers emphasize (explicitly or implicitly) the power of different groups affected by changes in agricultural policy and the role of farmers as an important interest group (e.g., Beckmann, Hagedorn, 2007; Rausser et al. 2011).

However, as Dür (2008a) stresses, the number of studies that empirically examine interest group influence in the EU is quite limited. Empirical studies devoted to interests groups' influence in the Central and Eastern Europe countries are even less numerous.¹ In addition, research usually concentrates on policy formulation and implementation at the European Union level and neglects the national level. But it is worth noting that the national level is the first and also the last stage in making agreements about the shape of policy. Therefore national farmers' associations could play an important role in political decision-making.

What is also interesting is that studies analyzing the activity of agricultural interest groups at the supranational European level demonstrate that these interest groups are strong and influential; moreover, they explain this by the fact that these interest groups are united, well organized, and relatively small (e.g., Pappi, Henning, 1999; Bednarikova, Jilkova, 2012). On the other hand, available research on farmers' associations in the Central and Eastern Europe countries show that the agricultural lobby is very fragmented and unorganized (for the Czech Republic see Bednarikova, Jilkova, 2012, for Poland – Milczarek-Andrzejewska, 2014). The important question that therefore arises is: what factors cause farmers' organizations to be perceived as strong at the supranational level, though not at the national level in given countries?

This paper seeks an answer by taking into account the specificity of Central and Eastern Europe. The region is still struggling with the legacy of communism, and this results in a telltale attitude toward the state and formal institutions. One issue having a severe impact on the activity and performance of organizations is the low level of trust (especially among farmers, Bijman et al., 2012), as well as

¹ For examples of research on agricultural interest groups in this region, see: Bavorova et al., 2005; Milczarek-Andrzejewska, 2014.

the negative experience of formal cooperation During the time of communism and the transition to a market economy (Möllers et al., 2015).

There are several difficulties in measuring interest group influence² and therefore distinct approaches are chosen by researchers. In this paper we concentrate on the resources and channels of influence used by interest groups. Most scholars agree that interest groups' endowment with resources increases their ability to influence decision-makers and policy outcomes. As Dür shows "not all interest groups are equally endowed with these resources, leading to the expectation that some groups are more influential than others" (Dür, 2008a: 1214). One can say that such an approach allows us to analyze an ex-ante or perceived influence (or power). Looking at the policy outcomes of interest group's activity³ could be treated as ex-post analysis and this goes beyond the scope of our article. In the paper we use the concept of an "attributed influence" (March, 1955) – understood as perceived influence. In line with that approach we analyze subjective assessments expressed by policy-makers and leaders of the farmers' associations as well as by members of these organizations.

This paper aims at describing which organizations' resources and channels of influence are the most important in shaping agricultural policy by taking into account the specific conditions in Eastern and Central Europe (CEE). For the purpose of this study we have adopted the exchange model. This model combines approaches to the influence of interest groups from various social sciences (mostly economics, sociology, and political sciences). Using this model we try to identify the role played by Polish farmers' associations in shaping agricultural policy at the national level. We also ask to what extent the Polish experience is characteristic for other CEE countries.

In the following section we present theoretical approaches used to analyze influence in the social sciences. Section 3, in turn, includes a conceptual model for analyzing farmers' associations. The results of empirical work are provided in section 4. Section 5 offers our conclusions.

2. Concepts of influence in social studies

Methods of defining and measuring influence are different in various sciences. Sociologists often define influence and power in terms of impact and 'transformative capacity'. Power is thereby related to the resources one possesses (Giddens, 1990). According to Webber power is the ability to influence, related to some personal characteristics, and the qualities resulting from the position that a person holds within an organization. The ability to influence means the capacity to intentionally alter the behaviour of others (Webber, 1984). Therefore, it refers to interactions within the organization. In the context of our study, it seems more important to investigate the impact of the organization on external actors and processes.

The model which seems the most suitable for the analysis of inter-organizational relationships is the exchange model developed in the 1960s by sociologists Blau, Levine, and White (Turner, 2002). According to this concept, the relationship between non-public and public organizations can be conceptualized as a series of exchanges. Before acceding to such exchange, organizations perform cost-benefit analysis. The relationship between organizations will continue as long as there is mutual benefit, which means that both parties are better off thanks to the relationship.

The second concept used by sociologists dealing with the relationship between organizations is resource dependency theory. Both concepts attach great importance to the exchange of resources. In the case of the latter, a greater emphasis is placed on the interdependence between organizations. According to resource dependency theory, organizations are not fully independent and need diverse

² See extensive discussion on methodology of measuring interest group influence in Dür (2008b).

³ Both approaches do of course have their shortcomings. For example, within the approach focusing on policy outcomes it could be difficult to distinguish between the impact of a given interest group's activities and other external factors.

resources from outside. They must therefore enter into relations with one another, or with groups controlling the resources they need. The relationship between these bodies may eventually lead to a situation in which one organization exerts pressure on another.

Considering an organization as an open system, i.e., a system linked with its environment, provides the basis for examination of the effect of the environment on the functioning of an organization. Then the success of an organization depends on the ability to exploit the features of its environment. The dynamics of the relations between an organization and the environment is based on the processes of exchange and interaction. It is therefore important to ask: what is the environment? In the situational theory of organization, formulated by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), the environment is understood in two ways. On the one hand, we are talking about a broad notion including the economy, environmental conditions, and cultural heritage. On the other hand, there exist a local, specific environment, comprising other organizations and individuals with whom the organization interacts.

Instead, economists focus mainly on the impact of organizations and interest groups on the "economic environment" and economic resources (Olson, 1982).⁴ The literature within new institutional economics shows the influence of interest groups on the environment in a somewhat broader way. It primarily emphasizes the role of interest groups in the process of institutional change.⁵ Interest groups compete for available resources, which in turn allow them to maintain a given position. Institutional arrangements created as a result of such competition do not necessarily increase economic efficiency, but they help maintain certain power relationships (Knight, 1992).

Below we try to combine a sociological approach (where both the processes within the organizations and their relations with the socio-economic environment are equally important) with an economic approach (where the purpose of the activities of organizations and their economic effects are essential).

3. Organizations and their influence on state policy – the exchange model as an interdisciplinary approach

The approach that seems very useful for analyzing organizations is the exchange model described in section 2 as it tackles the approach of different social sciences. On the one hand it allows us to capture methods of the activity and performance of the organization itself, which is especially interesting from the sociological point of view (Bursetin, Linton, 2002). On the other hand it allows us to analyze the influence of an organization on other actors, which is of interest to economists who concentrate on exchanges between distinct entities and the benefits gained from different kinds of transactions.

Figure 1 shows the model of exchange that we have adopted for the purpose of analyzing farmers' associations. First, the key issue is to analyze the resources used by an organization: those which the organization has, as well as those it can mobilize (potential resources). It is important to take into consideration both tangible resources and intangible ones. Examples of tangible resources that might play an important role in the exchange process include financial resources, number of members, type of memberships, offices, etc. These kinds of assets facilitate creation of the intangible resources which are very valuable for politicians. Especially expert knowledge about policy outcomes and public support "with which interest groups can strengthen certain policies advocated by politicians" (Pappi, Henning, 1999: 265) is very valuable. Another key resource that an interest group might have is public support for political actors. From the sociological point of view the processes within an

⁴ The today's economic research on interest groups and their influence on state policy is conducted mainly within new political economy (or political economics). For brevity reasons the discussion within this research field is not shown.

⁵ And since the institutional framework determines economic performance, it can be said that the representatives of new institutional economics are also primarily interested in economic effects.

organization (e.g., conflicts, a strong or weak leadership, type of membership) also affect the performance of interest groups.

Figure 1. Scheme of agricultural organizations exchange

The exchange is a sphere of “transactions” made with other actors – with political actors and other farmers’ and non-farmers’ organizations. These transactions bring both costs and benefits. In the exchange process with political actors organizations expect to achieve favourable changes in policies or in law. Benefits from transactions with other than political actors include support from other organizations in preparing protest actions. Received benefits depend on pathways to influence used by organizations in their relationships with other actors. The methods of how organizations affect and are affected by other actors include a wide range of activities, both formal and informal. It is worth noting that the types of pathways to influence are interconnected with the types and amount of resources each organization has. Groups are likely to use various types of pathways, depending also on whom they want to influence (whether politicians or public opinion, both of which influence policy outcomes indirectly in the long run) and on the stage of a policy’s creation (e.g., the time of the election campaign, passage of a bill, etc.) (Dür, 2008a).

There is no agreement between the researchers on which pathways to influence are the most efficient for an organization. The best is the one that enables the given organization to provide officials or other organizations with the information or resources that are required, or the one that draws the attention of public opinion (Burstein, Linton, 2002). Dür characterizes four pathways to influence: access, selection of decision-makers, voice, and structural coercion. Access understood as “direct expression of demands to decision-makers” (Dür, 2008a: 1221) includes personal meetings with politicians and officials, or making their views known to provide supporting evidence. It has to be acknowledged that access does not necessarily translate to influence. “Voice channels” (Dür, 2008a) mostly understood as demonstrations or rallies might affect public opinion and politicians at the same time. Burstein and Linton point that “what it takes to influence them [politicians] is dramatic, attention-getting changes in the political environment” (Burstein, Linton, 2002: 387). Structural power might be used by the economic actors deciding where to invest money dependent on the type of policy they are in favour.⁶

The exchange process is always affected by the institutional environment in which it takes place. The most important aspects of it are: institutional framework like formal arrangements and rules. The other aspect of institutional environment are the social capital of both members of organizations and potential members of given organizations. Moreover, the interest group’s performance depends on the level of socio-economic development, the strength of the state, the interest of state actors (including the centralization of the state, level of integration, and fragmentation of the policy), and the preferences of the particular politicians (Moschitz, Stolze, 2009). On the scheme below we focus on relations and exchange between organizations and other actors involved in this process. Our analysis is then conducted on the micro rather than macro level. Both the quality and quantity research tools were designed based on this scheme.

⁶ The organizations we analyze cannot be generally considered only as economic actors and this is why we do not focus on this pathway of influence in further analysis (see section 4.2).

4. A case study of farmers' organizations in Poland

4.1. Farmers' associations in Poland – brief characteristics

Based on their legal form, the five main types of organizations representing the interests of farmers in Poland can be distinguished as: agricultural chambers, farmers' trade unions, employers' organizations, agribusiness organizations (agribusiness federations and unions), and associations (Śpiwak et al., 2016). Taking into consideration the number of members and the thrust of activities (including the impact on agricultural policy) the most important agricultural organizations in Poland seem to be the trade unions and agribusiness organizations. At the same time, a large number of differences can be observed between these two types. Trade unions are significantly larger than the agribusiness organizations in terms of the number of members and operating scope. However, information about them is incomplete and unverifiable in practice. More precise data can be obtained about agribusiness organizations of various types. They usually have fewer members, although some (e.g., the Polish Association of Beekeepers) also have a nationwide scope, boasting many agencies and sections throughout the country. Typically, they integrate farmers with a similar type of agricultural production. Trade unions and agribusiness organizations are also different in terms of activity goals. Trade unions mainly embrace goals of a social nature. Federations of agribusiness organizations try to support its members and promote policy changes, and individually agribusiness organizations work for the development of specialized farms (Śpiwak et al., 2016). Six organizations – mostly trade unions – are members of the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organizations (COPA) and only one is a member of the General Committee for Agricultural Cooperation in the European Union (COGECA). On the other hand around half of the agribusiness organizations are members of supranational European organizations dedicated to their specialization.

Currently there are twelve farmers' trade unions in Poland. According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2015), in 2014 members of the trade unions of individual farmers made up 4% of the 1.6 million members of all trade unions in Poland, i.e., approx. 64 thousand people. Most of the farmers' trade unions did not charge a membership fee, therefore only approx. 4% of the members (approx. 2.5 thousand people) paid membership fees in 2014⁷. The oldest and largest trade unions are the National Union of Farmers, Agricultural Circles and Organizations (Krajowy Związek Rolników, Kółek i Organizacji Rolniczych), and the "Solidarity" Trade Union (Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolników Indywidualnych).

Some agribusiness organizations and their unions (federations) are organizations with a long tradition, whose history dates back even to the beginning of the twentieth century⁸, and which possess developed regional structures. Currently there are more than forty nationwide agribusiness organizations and unions. Most agribusiness organizations are concentrated in three nationwide federations. However, it is difficult to estimate the number of members affiliated to these organizations, since only a small part of this type organization provides such information. The majority of organizations also do not publish information regarding membership fees.

Agricultural chambers – being institutions of the agricultural self-government – were founded in 1995. Membership in the chambers is "automatic": they unite all private and legal persons who are agricultural tax payers, individual income tax payers from special branches of the agricultural production, and members of the collective farms owing land in these cooperatives. They are financed from a 2% tax write-off on agricultural property which allows for financial stability (Milczarek-

⁷ For comparison, among all the surveyed trade unions in 2014 up to 86% of members paid membership fees (according to the declarations of trade unions).

⁸ For example, the Regional Association of Beekeepers in Kraków cites 1916 as the beginning of its activity (<http://wzp-krakow.pl/aktualnosci.html>; access 30.11.2015), and the National Union of Sugar Beet Growers was established in 1921 (<http://www.kzpb.com.pl/>; access 30.11.2015).

Andrzejewska, 2014). However, voter turnout in the elections of members of the chambers' local authorities is very low (in the 2015 elections it reached ca. 4%⁹), which fact shows there is little interest in this form of representation.

The largest employers' organization (federation of employers – tenants and agricultural owners) represents farmers with large land resources and high production potential. Associations unite especially smaller farmers, mainly: soft fruit growers, vine growers, beekeepers, and organic farmers. Most of the associations were founded after Poland's accession to the European Union (Śpiewak et al., 2016).

4.2. Results of survey

Data

Our empirical analysis is based on two sources. Both research tools were designed based on the above described model of exchange (see Figure 1). The first one is a qualitative survey conducted with 21 respondents between the summer and winter of 2015. The research consisted of structured in-depth interviews with leaders of agricultural organizations (15, including 5 from farmers' trade unions, 9 from agribusiness organizations, and 1 from an agricultural chamber), 4 experts (from DG AGRI and Polish Ministry of Agriculture officials), , and politicians (2).

The second source of data is that of the results of a questionnaire conducted in the summer of 2016 among 601 members of these organizations¹⁰. Some farmers belonged to two organizations and therefore we gathered information on 684 organizations including: 402 agribusiness organizations and 282 trade unions. The survey instrument applied is a structured questionnaire, tailor-made to capture the model the authors have elaborated (see Figure1). The questionnaire covers general demographic characteristics, as well as detailed questions on the assessment of the organizations farmers belonged to and their assessment of all farmers' associations in Poland.

The research was carried out in two of Poland's 16 voivodeships: Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie voivodship. These two regions were chosen due to their specific characteristics. Małopolskie voivodship is located in the southeastern Poland which is a relatively structurally homogeneous region having a relatively dense network of local urban centers and large villages. This voivodship is characterized by a high degree of land fragmentation and a long-standing tradition of non-agricultural work in addition to farming activities. Wielkopolskie voivodship is located in the western part of Poland. This region is characterized by relatively high levels of social and human capital and a long-standing tradition of cooperation between neighbouring farms. It has a relatively advantageous agrarian structure (Rosner, Stanny, 2017).

Quota sampling was used in the survey due to the problems with receiving official lists of members from farmers' associations and due to unknown precise numbers of these organizations' members (see section 4.1). The quota sample was drawn in two stages. In the first stage sample was divided equally according to the region (Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie voivodships). In the second stage respondents were divided into two groups: members of trade unions and agribusiness organizations. It was assumed that each of these groups must be represented in the sample at a minimum level of 40%. The original sampling frame was compiled from several sources: data published online (including farmers' association websites, announcements, etc.); lists of producers representing the

⁹ <http://www.krir.pl/wybory-do-izb-rolniczych> (access 17.11.2015).

¹⁰ In this article the authors refer only to the part of the questionnaire that regards the assessment of the organization (or organizations) they belong to.

sectors represented by organizations; information obtained directly from agricultural organizations; and private sources.

Resources of farmers' organizations

The first group of questions concerned the resources of agricultural organizations. We asked about the resources necessary to influence agricultural policy and the resources currently possessed by these organizations. In answering what kind of resources farmers' organizations should have, respondents indicated primarily expert knowledge and financial resources. The activity of members was indicated in the third place. The resources they actually have differ according to the type of organization, whether they are trade unions or agribusiness organizations (see Table 1). The interviewed representatives of trade unions indicated the large memberships of their organizations, but they were not able to give precise numbers. They also stressed that membership fees are usually not collected. The collected amount was low and not sufficient to finance their organization's activity. They also pointed out their extended territorial structures. Trade unions, as their leaders admitted, have limited capacities to provide expertise and knowledge that would be valuable for politicians. The interviewed leaders of agribusiness organizations specified the precise number of members and they emphasized the high level of representativeness of their organizations in given production sectors. The respondents admitted that farmers united in agribusiness organizations regularly pay fees (often representing a given share of farm turnover) and are quite active. They admitted that they are able to provide expert knowledge, however it was mostly based on their own experience and the knowledge of other members. Only one trade union publishes a monthly magazine, while half of the analyzed agribusiness organizations publishes magazines. This is important both for their own members as well as a tool for influencing public opinion. Leaders of organizations, especially of trade unions, stressed that insufficient resources decreases the power of farmers' organizations in relation to bureaucrats and politicians as well as other organizations.

Table 1. Opinions of leaders of organizations on their organization resources

At the same time, the results of our quantitative research paint a very different picture of agricultural organizations. According to the respondents, regardless of the type of organization they belong, all are well endowed with tangible and intangible resources (see Table 2).

Table 2: Resources of the organization the respondents belong to, in their own opinion

Leaders assessments of their organization's resources, as well as the data provided by the analysis of secondary data, are very distinct from the opinion of interviewed farmers – members of organizations. This might stem from members' lack of real interest in the activities of their organization and their lack of communication within the given institution.

Pathways to influence

The most common channel of influence used by Polish organizations is access Dür (2008a: 1221) defines as a "direct expression of demands to decision-makers". In the opinion of respondents the most important decision-maker is the Minister of Agriculture himself or high level officials in this ministry. In some cases respondents mentioned the Prime Minister or the Minister of Health. The members of organizations were divided when it came to the issue of accessing Members of Parliament. One of the leaders of an agribusiness organization said: *the Members of Parliament have nothing to say*. The vast majority of respondents were keen on sharing their demands with MPs, however it was their second choice. Attempts to access decision-makers at the local level were mentioned only in the context of specific local issues (like draught).¹¹

¹¹ In 2015 (when the survey was conducted) Polish farmers were hit by a severe draught, and they could apply for reimbursement of their losses.

“Voice channels” (Dür, 2008a), mostly understood as demonstrations or rallies, might affect both public opinion and politicians at the same time. This channel of influence is used by almost all the organizations with varying frequency, typically in the last resort. Other organizations have used voice channels in order to *draw attention to crucial issues and to accomplish something* (as one of respondents said). However, this method was used quite often, which means that leaders of the organizations feel that their demands are rarely taken seriously. *We have achieved nothing by meetings with the minister, so we had to bring 2 thousand people in order to make them talk with us seriously* (the respondent said). As the respondents use vague descriptions of the demonstrations’ goals, it is difficult to identify if they aim to influence public opinion or politicians. Foryś (2008), in his analysis of a farmers’ protest, shows that the main recipients of the farmers’ demands are the state’s central institutions. Only leaders of two agribusiness organizations were opposed to demonstrations. As one of them said: *rallies and demonstrations are dividing people, are creating barriers between people*.

None of the respondents pointed out that their organization has tried to directly influence the process of election campaigns. However, the chairman of one of the biggest farmers’ trade unions¹² at one and the same time has been a senator in the Polish parliament – and for 10 years. Other leaders of organizations have also run for parliament. Respondents from agricultural organizations, the experts, as well as politicians emphasized the fact that agricultural organizations are divided and fragmented, so their voice is not heard. The organizations hardly ever try to present common demands and to jointly exert pressure on policy makers. Part of the leaders of agribusiness organizations has proposed creating a trilateral commission or coordinating body to facilitate the representation of farmers’ opinions. Table 3 summarizes the pathways to influence presented by leaders of both kinds of organizations.

Table 3. Pathways to influence used by various organizations of farmers

The exchange model describes mutual process, so it also has to be acknowledged what channels of influence are used by the actors involved in the exchange process from the realm of politics in order to reach farmers’ organizations. Government officials stressed that agricultural organizations are often invited on various occasions to share their opinion or work on particular issues, but they rarely answer the invitations, much less engage in working groups.

Dür (2008a) notes that interest groups usually use various pathways in order to reach politicians. Our research shows that farmers’ organizations predominantly combine two types of channels of influence. In the first place is access and in the second voice channels. We argue that insufficient resources owned by farmers’ organizations lead to the fact that the direct expression of demands is often impossible, and so organizations decide to “make noise” in order to be heard by both politicians and public opinion.

Members of both types of organizations perceive their organization as being very active. For example, 94% claim that their organization holds meetings for members on a regular basis. In their opinion their organizations use various channels of influence, such as cooperation with Members of Parliament (75% of indications) and the Ministry of Agriculture (81%). Cooperation with EU institutions was less often indicated. 43% of the group researched admitted that their organization carries out cooperation with the EU.

As in the case of assessing resources, the case of perceived activity and pathways to influence also varies in great degree between leaders and members. The explanation might be similar as in the case of the assessment of the resources. Members might not have a clear view on the performance of the organization they belong to.

¹² We have been unable to obtain precise data about the number of members in this trade union.

Institutional environment

The process of exchange takes place in a specific institutional environment. The farmers' organizations operate in a defined institutional framework, and differing types of organizations operate on the basis of separate laws. The institutional framework as an obstacle was pointed out by the agribusiness organizations and experts. They indicated that the laws that they operate on are out of date and do not conform with today's reality. Experts argued that due to bad or unclear legislation there is no tenure for the management of farmers' organizations (especially in the case of trade unions), so leaders usually hold their position for a very long time. For example, the head of agricultural circles was the vice chairman for 10 years (till 1999) – and since then he has been chairman of this organization. Such a leader will not be very competitive and will be less willing to seek better operational methods for the organization. This also results in blurring the boundaries between politics and the farmers' interests.

The other obstacle in the sphere of institutional framework that was pointed out by the representatives of organizations was the lack of competences or willingness to answer the needs of farmers' organizations by the ministry bureaucrats.¹³ In the opinion of some of the respondents one of the reasons for this is the fragmentation of the farmers' organizations and the lack of coordination between them, including as regards their demands: the officials receive different opinions on the same topic and they are unable to find the best one.

However, the crucial element of the environment that affects many spheres of the performance of farmers' organizations is related to the weakness of social capital in various dimensions. The biggest obstacle is the low level of social trust. Farmers do not trust each other, nor do they trust state institutions. As one of the interviewed leaders of a farmers' union said: *...there is such a deep divide [between farmers] and sense of independence that there is no solidarity between farmers*. All respondents pointed out that the biggest obstacle in the performances of farmers' organizations is reluctance to organize, especially in formal organizations. This is due to various factors. The experts interviewed usually emphasized farmers' mentality. For example, one of them said: *The source of it is mentality, still having in mind the period of collectivization, and communist times*.

It can be assumed that this has led to another obstacle in attracting more farmers to involvement in any organization. As one of the interviewees said: *farmers have no sense of civil society*. The other reason for this is the lack of "true" leaders in farmers' organizations or generally between farmers.

In the opinion of representatives of agribusiness organizations as well experts, farmers are reluctant to join the farmers' trade union since they do not see any benefits from being a member of such an organization. Organizations that offer clear benefits for their members – as the agribusiness organizations like the union of beekeepers – are more attractive to new members.

Not only do farmers' organizations have few members: those who already are members are often passive. This issue was emphasized both by the experts and leaders of organizations. One of the experts said: *when nothing happens they [the farmers] are reluctant to pay membership fees or undertake any actions*.

It can be argued that important obstacles for the process of exchange between farmers' organizations and other actors can be found within the institutional framework. However we are of the opinion that the greatest difficulty arises from the low level of social capital of Polish farmers. This statement can be also supported by the opinions of respondents who often pointed out that the farmers' mentality (lack of trust, unwillingness to associate) poses an obstacle to wielding influence.

¹³ Most often mentioned was the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Process of exchange - discussion

It has to be acknowledged that the process of exchange depends on the value of the resources for political actors or other organizations in terms of achieving their goals, such as re-election and changing policies. As Dür (2008a) emphasizes, another factor which affects the process of exchange is the availability of alternative resources.

The resources possessed by agricultural organizations (including expert knowledge about policy outcomes and public support) are evaluated as insufficient. However, there is a difference between agribusiness organizations and trade unions. The first organization type poses some degree of expert knowledge, however limited to narrow issues directly linked to the type of activity that each organization focuses on. Taking into consideration the low level of unionization of farmers we can assume that the public support offered by members of farmers' trade unions is not valuable for public actors. Moreover, the expert knowledge offered by this type of organization is limited to general political issues. As research shows (Śpiwak et al., 2016), the most important goal of agricultural trade unions is attending to social issues and employment relationships, while in the case of agribusiness organizations the main objective is to impact agricultural policy and improve the competitiveness of Polish agriculture. This shows that trade unions are more focused on the small, often semi-subsistence farms, and the latter act in favour of the market-oriented farms. Their opinions and demands are often different and even contradictory, which – as our respondents said – makes dialogue difficult. At the same time, representatives of organizations often underline that they are not listened to, whether by political actors or other organizations. In their opinion their demands are often not acknowledged by political actors. This can be explained by both the above-mentioned fragmentation of organizations and the lack of solidarity between the organizations, which reflects the lack of coherent demands as well as the insufficient use of pathways to influence, which as Molm (2009) stresses, is very important for the outcomes of the exchange process. She discovers that these outcomes also include other exchange outcomes, such as the rise of trust and commitment. The problem also lies in the lack of competences or willingness to answer the needs of farmers' organizations by the government clerks/bureaucrats.

Bearing this in mind we can argue that the process of exchange is weak: politicians do not gain much expert knowledge nor public support from the farmers' organizations. The agricultural organizations do not achieve their goals understood in terms of control of policy domains or winning policies that favour their economic or other interests.

The discrepancy between the result of qualitative and quantitative research is astonishing. While the leaders of both kinds of organizations see many obstacles in the performance of their organization due to an insufficient amount of resources, the members of the organizations perceive their organizations as well-endowed with resources, active, and using various channels of influence. Based on analysis of the qualitative research and secondary data, the authors have stressed the vast differences between the two types of organizations, while the results of quantitative research do not confirm this. Members of both types of organizations perceive their organizations in a similar way. This might be due to the weakness of the organizations, i.e., lack of communication within the organizations, and the fact that members evaluate their institution based on expectations, not achievements.

5. Conclusions

To analyze the resources of farmers' associations and their ability to influence agricultural policy, we used an interdisciplinary model based on the exchange theory – namely, the model on organizations' resources and pathways to influence. That model also acknowledges the institutional environment in which the exchange process takes place.

Our results show that agricultural organizations in Poland are generally heterogeneous and weak. Agribusiness organizations have greater potential to represent farmers' interests than do trade unions. Their advantages result mainly from relatively larger resources. According to our findings, farmers' associations in Poland may influence agricultural policy (both at the national and the EU levels) only to a small degree. The greatest weakness is an insufficient amount of tangible and intangible resources, especially those that could be valuable for politicians – expert knowledge and political support. The second obstacle stems from the disunity of the agricultural organizations and the lack of solidarity between farmers' organizations. This suggests that these results could also be important for other CEE countries because of the continuing legacy of the communist period that still spawns distrust toward formal cooperation.

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Table 1. Opinions of leaders of organizations on their organization resources

Category of resources	Trade unions Frequency of answers (out of 5)	Agribusiness organizations including the employers' organization Frequency of answers (out of 9)
Expert knowledge	Almost non	4
Financial resources (fees)	Almost non	7
Activity of members	Not mentioned	6
Number of members	3	4
Territorial structures	5	5
Media/magazines	1	4

Source: Own elaboration based on results of qualitative survey.

Table 2: Resources of the organization the respondents belong to, in their own opinion

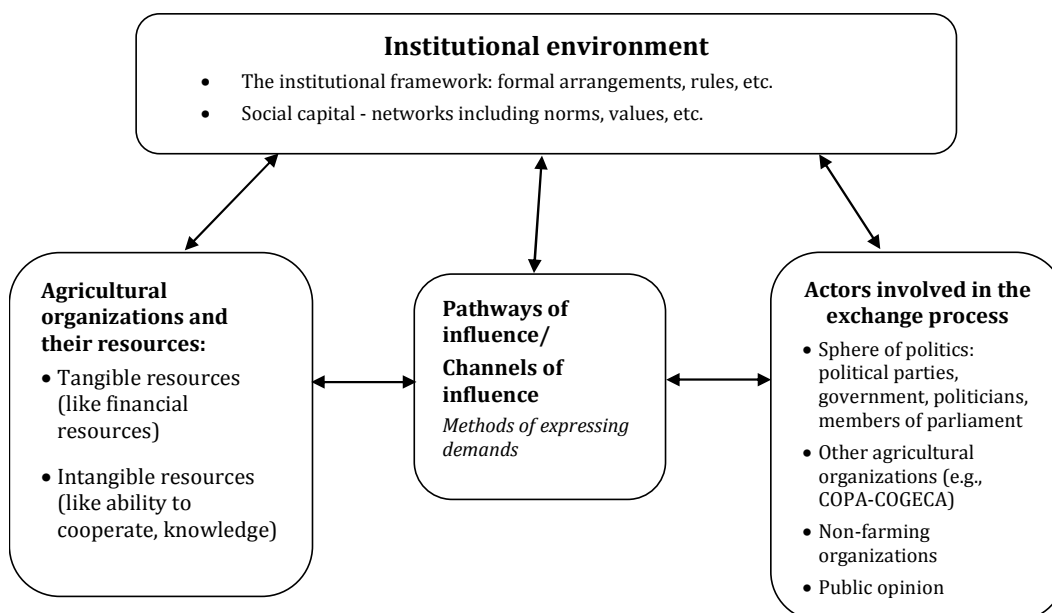
Category of resources	Share of answers (out of 684)
Membership fees paid	87 %
Organization has an office in my county (powiat)	32 %
Organization has its own magazine	42 %
Organization has its own website	84 %
Organization has active members	85 %
Organization cooperates with experts from the research centres	81 %

Source: Own elaboration based on results of quantitative research.

Table 3. Pathways to influence used by various organizations of farmers

Type of pathway / type of organization	Farmers' trade unions	Agribusiness organizations
Access (direct expression of demands to decision-makers)	+	+
Access (direct expression of demands, opinions to other farmers' organizations)	+/-	+
Selection of politicians - contributing to election campaigns	+	-
Selection of politicians - influencing public opinion	-	-
Voice channels (e.g., manifestations, rallies, petitions)	+	+

Source: Own elaboration based on results of qualitative survey, where “+” means this pathway is commonly used; “-” this pathway is not used at all; “+/-” it is used seldom.

Figure 1. Scheme of agricultural organizations exchange

Source: Own analysis based on: Dür, 2008a; Burstein, Linton, 2002; Pappi, Henning, 1999; Moschitz, Stolze, 2009.