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LIVING CONDITIONS OF FEMALE FARMERS IN AUSTRIA

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ABSTRACT

Understanding living conditions is critical to the understanding of female farmers' way of life. They are fundamental to people's lives and vary from person to person. Normatively speaking, a good life cannot be achieved without having good living conditions. The term living conditions, either as a target of different political interests, agendas and priorities or closely related to private spheres of life, refers to the circumstances surrounding an individual's life. This paper: (I) aims to define the multidimensional concept of living conditions, (II) considers the importance of the concept and its application, and (III) offers statistically proven insights into the living conditions of female farmers in Austria. The analysis is based on select data from the female farmers' surveys in Austria. All in all, the results reveal the development from 2006 to 2016. The areas examined (education, financial independence, civic engagement, work-life balance, social network and job satisfaction) show a positive development but there is also room for improvement – especially in the cases of financial inclusion and work life balance. Moreover, there is clearly a need to learn more about the living conditions of female farmers – especially in connection with their lifestyle, and other concepts such as quality of life, social inclusion and standard of living. Finally this paper tries to elaborate on the need for further research and future perspectives.

Keywords: *female farmers, living conditions, Austria.*

INTRODUCTION

In line with the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, undated) for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the consideration and evaluation of statistics on living conditions has increased (Eurostat, 2014, undated; OECD, 2017; International Forum on Rural Women, undated; O'Neill, 2018; Statistics Austria, 2017; Statistics Sweden, undated). As farming continues to change living conditions in agriculture have been increasingly in the spotlight over the last decades (Källström, 2002; World Bank Group 2018). This interest in female farmers has largely developed as a critical response to the way in which women's labour had been treated in agricultural research (Friedland, 1991; Haugen, 1990; Whatmore, 1991). It reflects a shift to a more nuanced view of agricultural life. Inherent in this literature is an anticipation of change in favour of female farmers.

The concept of 'living conditions' emerged as an important policy concept in Europe in the 1940s (International Forum on Rural Women, undated). It was a response to the growing social divides that resulted from labour market conditions and the inadequacy of existing social welfare provisions to meet the changing needs of more diverse populations. Living conditions is not, however, just a response to unequal conditions of life. Although many of the papers use living conditions as the starting point for their discussions, they share with us the view that the concept of 'living conditions' has a value on its own as both a process and a goal. Living conditions are about making sure that all humans are able to live a valued, good life. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept – a way of raising the bar and understanding how we want to live and how to get there.

An assessment of living conditions can provide a more detailed picture of the progress in economic and social development than a development analysis of traditional economic indicators. Indicators of living conditions offer useful information about important issues, *e.g.* income, education and job opportunities (Eurofound, 2010).

Statistics on female farmers' living conditions currently are few and far between. Basically, this paper broaches the issue of the living conditions of female farmers in Austria. The result of a development analysis is based on the most important indicators recommended by Eurofound (2010), Statistics New Zealand (2009) and Statistics Sweden (undated). With this in mind, this paper firstly frames the concept of living conditions by identifying the main criteria and characteristics. In the second part, there is a description of material and data used. The presentation and evaluation of the findings follow. Finally, we conclude and look at further areas of research.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Throughout history female and male farmers have shaped nature and have maintained food production and other related amenities. Recognizing the importance of difference and diversity has become central to new understandings of identity at both a national and professional level. Female farmers play a key role on the family farm and thus in agriculture (Brandt, 2002; Brasier *et al.*, 2014). The concept of living conditions is crucial in recasting female farmers' lives.

Living conditions form one of the precepts for a conception of a sustainable livelihood as well as the achievement of an adequate quality of life or a good life (*c.f.* Quendler, 2014). Hereby the term living conditions refers to the fulfilment of (basic) needs in the long-term as well as the achievement of eudaemonistic values – as for example outlined by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954). Living conditions build on the different material and immaterial needs according to resources and services available within a specific environment. The concept is defined in terms of access to resources in the form of money, possessions, knowledge, mental and physical energy and social relationships – through which individuals can control and consciously direct their living conditions. This is, in part, based on the Swedish approach – *c.f.* Erikson and Aberg, 1987. (Eurofound,

2010) In terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs this paper presupposes the fulfilment of the first two levels of needs *i.e.* the physiological and safety needs have been attained.

This view of living conditions recognises that the value of a given set of possibilities to use resources and services depends on the context in which they are used. The decision when, how and to what extent to exploit any given set of possibilities depends solely on the individual's attitude, life strategies and choice which however are all, in turn, influenced by a multitude of factors making up the surrounding environment. (DFID, 1999; Eurofound, 2010) Much in the way of a feedback gain in an operational amplifier. The ability of the next generation to enjoy the same possibilities as a result of the living conditions enjoyed and 'decided on' by the current generation forms the critical link to the notion of sustainable livelihood.

There are several barriers that limit the living conditions. For one thing, the notion of protecting present and future generations seems remote in the face of the pressures of contemporary standards of living, financial crises and the limited resources available. On the other hand, the concept is often associated with resource constraints and the maintenance of status quo rather than with opportunities for continued innovation, growth, and prosperity. Living conditions that go beyond the basic minimum are sustainable only if conditions everywhere have regard for long-term sustainable development. Furthermore, living conditions are often misinterpreted as just a goal to which we should collectively aspire as a desirable state. In fact, specific living conditions are not an end state that humans have or can reach; rather, they are a characteristic of a dynamic, evolving process. (*c.f.* Quendler, 2014; Statistics New Zealand, 2009)

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The analysis presented in this paper refers to the Eurofound (2010), Statistics New Zealand (2009) and Statistics Sweden (undated). Literature reviews state that living conditions are a complex and challenging concept that cannot be reduced to only one dimension. The description of the components and indicators used to describe a socially inclusive good life is shown in Table 1. These have been ordered corresponding to their relationship to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. While there is no perfect match between the indicators chosen here and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs the parallels are obvious. Unfortunately there is no data available for female farmers on income and income inequality.

Table 1. Description of the components of living conditions in the sense of a socially inclusive good life.

Components/indicators [Maslow's level]	Description		
Satisfaction with the job female famer [Self-actualisation]	It measures the percentage of respondents that would call themselves "female farmer" or make the same choice of profession again.	Valuing and recognising the profession Promoting satisfaction and happiness in life	
Work-life-balance [Self-actualisation]	Time for holiday	The proportion of respondents that have time for holiday and have time also to relax everyday.	
	Time for relaxation		
Education level [Self-actualisation Esteem]	It measures the percentage of respondents successfully completing upper secondary school.	Ensuring opportunities to attain knowledge and skills Developing knowledge and skills to meet economic needs	
Financial independence [Esteem]	Off-farm job	It measures the percentage of respondents with an off-farm job.	Ensuring that economic activity meets the needs of individuals and society effectively Ensuring that female farmers have a sense of identity and independent
	Bank account	The proportion of respondents that have an account at a bank.	Promoting social participation
Civic engagement [Love/belonging]	The proportion of respondents that are engaged in voluntary activities.	Promoting civic and political participation Promoting social participation	
Social Network [Love/belonging]	Moral support	It measures the percentage of respondents that are embedded in a social network in case of illness, financial and personal problems.	Basic needs met with options to meet more Strengthening partnership and social participation
	Financial support		
	Illness		

*Source: Eurofound (2010), Maslow (1954), Statistics New Zealand (2009) and Statistics Sweden (undated).

In order to get a picture of female farmers' living conditions select data from two surveys taken on female farmers throughout Austria (Geserick *et al.*, 2008; KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017) is analysed. The two surveys in question took place in 2006 and 2016 and deployed different methods. In 2006, the total number of Austrian farms formed the overall population, but in 2016 the number of farms according to Austrian IACS farm data constituted the population for the survey. While in the 2006 survey the return number of questionnaires was 1,127 (on a

target of 1,000) in 2016 the response rate came to 2,200 female farmers due to the online nature of the survey. For the purposes of standardisation the survey populations of the two years were considered using the characteristics: age, location of farm (federal province) and farm size (UAA). The nominal and ordinal data sets were based on answers of either yes or no and scales, for example 'frequency and duration of holidays', satisfaction with the job. For example the best score (very good) is calculated with 1, good with 0.67, less well with 0.33 and the worst one with 0. Thus, criteria such as satisfaction can be expressed by a single measure, the index value. The index can range from 0 to 1. The nearer the calculated value of the indicator is to 1 (or 100%) the more it is fulfilled, *i.e.* the better off in the context of the indicator defined (Bartle, 1964).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Compared to the year 2006 the living conditions for female farmers have improved (Figure 1). The results pertaining to social networking are very positive; most of them have someone in case of problems. However, all other indicators show room for improvement when female farmers aim to improve their living conditions as defined in this paper. It may happen that a female farmer is happy to work on the farm and there is no need, for example, for a holiday or off-farm job. Figure 1 shows the values calculated for each indicator.

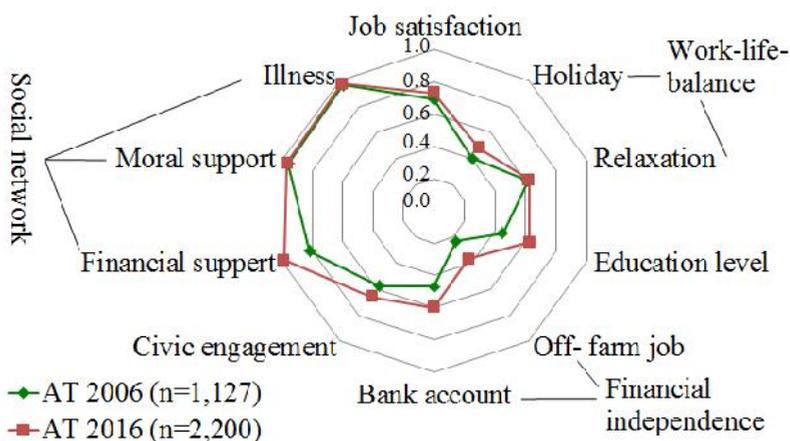


Figure 1. Living conditions of female farmers in Austria, 2006 versus 2016.

*Source: own visualisation according to Geserick, Kapella, Kaindl (2008), KeyQUEST Marktforschung (2017).

Satisfaction with the job female farmer

In 2006 79%, in 2016 72%, of the female farmers surveyed identified themselves with the job of female farmer. In each case the reminder are women that identify themselves with the off-farm job. This notwithstanding the answer to the question as to whether the female farmer would take up her job again serves as a general

measure of satisfaction. In 2006, 69% of respondents said they would return to the same farm work, and by 2016 satisfaction steadily rose to 73%. These results show the identification and satisfaction of female farmers with the job of female farmer. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

Work-life-balance

63% of the female farmers have time for rest and relaxation in everyday life – in 2006 it was 62%. If in 2006 the figure was 41%, in 2016 already 71% of female farmers had taken a vacation for at least a week. Of those in 2016, 45% (2006: 41%) of them go on holiday occasionally and only 26% of regularly. Of the 29%, who had never been on holiday, 7% would like to go on holiday. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

Education

The education level of the female farmers surveyed has risen between 2006 and 2016. In 2016, 63% of respondents had completed secondary education whereas in 2006 it was 45% (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). The number of those respondents who have a Matura (A-level) or have graduated from a university of applied sciences or university has increased. Importantly, post-secondary education or tertiary education reflects the level of human capital development resulting in higher returns to education thereby also contributing to higher rates of economic growth and additional employment opportunities.

Financial independence

The proportion of female farmers who work off-farm has increased by 15 percentage points over the past 10 years. This corresponds to an increase of 41%. In 2016, 37% of female farmers work in their trained profession, usually more than 20 hours or up to 20 hours per week all year round. The main motivation of female farmers for off-farm work is to be financially independent (55%). This is followed by ‘use of the skills learned’ (53%) and ‘additional income’ (49%). The motives ‘contact with other people’ (46%) and the ‘change from the farm’ (42%) receive less approval. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

Access to a personal account has increased since 2006. In 2006, 47% of respondents had a personal account, compared to 60% of women in 2016 (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017). This and the development of the indicator ‘off-farm employment’ not only ensure but also strengthen the financial independence of female farmers. This goes hand in hand with the increasing proportion of female farmers who work off-farm.

Civic engagement

Honorary appointments play an important part in the lives of female farmers. In 2016, 66% of the female farmers were voluntarily engaged in at least one organisation (see Figure 1). In 2006, the figure was 58%. In comparison, 24% of all women in Austria undertook voluntary work in 2012 (2006: 23%) (Bundesministerium für Soziales und Konsumentenschutz 2008, Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz 2013). When

female farmers take on duties in clubs, in communities and in politics, they know that such activities involve additional burdens (but also enrichments) and require time and energy, and the help of the whole family. In order to engage more easily, female farmers gave the following assessments regarding support wanted: 40% would like to have more time. 32% say they expect more support from society. 29% require no support. 14% would like to be more supported by the family (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017).

Social networks

Social networks are important for female farmers in daily life in case of financial, personal and health problems. Female farmers are most likely to report that they have a perceived source of financial support in their social network, with 98% in 2016, compared to 81% in 2006. Evidently, the response behaviour was similar in the case of illness. In 2016, 98% of female farmers have someone who cares about them in the case of illness, compared to 97% in 2006. In the case of moral support, almost equal proportions of respondents in 2016 and 2006 indicated that they have someone when they need someone to talk to. In 2006 96% of female farmers had someone and in 2016 it was 95%. (KeyQUEST Marktforschung, 2017)

CONCLUSION

‘Living conditions’ is a fundamental concept to understanding female farmers’ specificity, conditions of existence, and also the close relation between their behaviour and the structure of opportunities and constraints in which they occur. The results give insight into the development of living conditions connected to female farmers between 2006 and 2016. Overall, the development is a positive one. But it is likewise clear that there is still a need for future action. This further reinforces the need to learn more about the living conditions of female farmers in comparison to male farmers or Austrian women or the population overall. No doubt, gender ideology has played a crucial role in masking the living conditions of female farmers.

In this respect the following points are offered in conclusion: (I) Defining and measuring living conditions: Living conditions remain an elusive concept in this analysis of wellness and welfare research. It is evident that well-being and welfare despite the given policy have the potential to influence living conditions, but far too often living conditions are assumed as a consequence of being successful in the job. The emphases in this paper have been on the living conditions of female farmers. There is a need for action in the case of income and income inequality. This raises several questions: How might we deal with or measure living conditions in order to derive and introduce appropriate measures where necessary? Long term studies are necessary in order to determine the effects on female farmers but also on male farmers or Austria as a whole. In this context the definition of living conditions must be continually revisited and revised in the light of such research but should also include concepts such as lifestyle, quality of life, standard of living, social inclusion, degree of sustainability at different levels, etc. (II) Superstructure and procedures: Policies regarding equity and social support have to be respected.

In order to maximize equal opportunities hierarchical structures must give way to widespread consultation, equal representation, positive and community based action, empowering female farmers to make their own choices and keep control of programmes.

Despite being highly developed in many areas, Austria can also do more in its recognition and support for living conditions. This is not merely a gender equity issue. The Austrian agricultural sector faces challenges from both environmental change and a competitive global market which may be detrimental to the given or further development of living conditions.

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