Structural change in the post-socialist transformation of Central European agriculture: Studies from the Czech and Slovak Republics

Bezemer, D.J.

Citation for published version (APA):
Preface

I have greatly enjoyed doing this Ph.D. project. It has offered me a combination of advantages that, I assume, is rarely found in a job: freedom in the content and planning of my work within very generous margins; the pleasant obligation to study, discuss and write about topics of my own liking, again within limits that were never constraints; the opportunity to travel and explore other countries; and best of all, it is considered a job!

There were minor drawbacks. My car was stolen in Slovakia. A bank where I had, after time-consuming preparations, been allowed to conduct a survey among its local branch managers, went bankrupt and that research was cancelled. Farm managers whom I visited for interviews always insisted on having a few drinks and inspecting the pigsty. You now hold the result of all this, and a lot more, in your hands. I have tried to make a contribution to what we know about the recent market reforms and their effects in Central European agriculture. If that is of interest to you, I hope you indeed find new and relevant facts and interpretations in this book, and enjoy the read. If not – thanks for your interest!

Acknowledgements

I gladly use the opportunity to acknowledge the intellectual, organisational and financial support received during this project. Michael Ellman initiated this research by inviting me to do a Ph.D. under his supervision. His exceptional availability, prompt and meticulous reading of my writings, advice on many practical matters to an academic novice, and his liberal view on student supervision have all been great stimuli for this and other research I have undertaken in the past five years.

Intellectual stimulation and help in finding the focus was also received from colleagues. In the field of agricultural economics Konrad Hagedorn, Gabriel Hughes, Erik Mathijs, Achim Schlütter, Jo Swinnen, and Axel Wolz have given me the advantage of their advice, comments and critique. Closer by, Ruud Knaack deserves separate mention because he suggested the geographical scope of the project.

Organisational assistance was received from the staff at the Tinbergen Institute and the UvA General Economics Department, present and past, including Arianne, Elfie, Jeroen, Marian, Miep, and Ronnie, as well as Robert, Loes, Renée and Puck. I could not have done the practical survey work without the help of Libor Grega, Petr Procházka, and especially Barbora Kysilková of the Mendel University at Brno, Czech Republic; and Karol Fronec, Josef Szovics and Klara
Olajsovo of Nitra Agricultural University, Slovakia. Tomáš Doucha and Tomáš Rátinger of the Czech Institute for Agricultural Research, Jarmila Ullmannová of the Prague Agricultural University, Maria Faziková and Petr Bielik of Nitra Agricultural University, Gejza Blaas of the Slovak Institute for Agricultural Research, and Bronislava Marcineková of the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture in Bratislava have provided useful materials and discussions.

I thank the Czech Association of Private Farmers and a number of district representatives of the Czech-Moravian Union of Agricultural Co-operatives for help in accessing address databases. I also thank all interviewees and survey respondents in Czech and Slovak agribusiness who provided me with the information that is the empirical backbone of this book. In addition, many of them received me with great hospitality. I retain happy memories of informative talk over liquor, coffee, or beer and sausages – and sometimes over combinations of all of them.

Colleagues at the Department or at the Institute have included Ruta Aidis, Paul Frijters, Albert van der Horst, Franc Klaassen, Luc Moers, Klarita Sadiraj, Robert Scharrenborg, Batara Simutapang, and Xander Tieman with whom I have, though the years, shared rooms and breaks. They have provided practical help, stimulating discussions and a measure of diversion from research work.

Finally, I would like to also thank the NWO, the Tinbergen Institute, the ESRC and the Chair of Transition Economics of the Department of General Economics, University of Amsterdam. All these institutions have contributed financially to the realisation of the fieldwork and to conference visits.

Almere, March 2001

Dirk Bezemer