



Embeddedness or Marginalization? Aspects for Analysing the Local Embeddedness of Innovative Agricultural Enterprises in Szeklerland

Zoltán BIRÓ A.

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
birozoltan@uni.sapientia.ro

Ágnes SÁROSI-BLÁGA

WAC – Centre for Regional and Anthropological Research, Miercurea-Ciuc, Romania
agnesblaga@gmail.com

Abstract. Relying on an interview-based research carried out in the Szeklerland region (Romania), the present study investigates the social embeddedness patterns of innovative agricultural initiatives existing in rural areas. The analysis covers three areas: structural embeddedness patterns of local scale, practical initiatives strengthening social embeddedness, and ideas of innovative actors on their future role within the local community. The innovative agricultural actors included in the analysis are local agents who attempt to position themselves and their activities on a local scale amidst diffuse and constantly changing conditions. The specific forms of embeddedness under scrutiny here indicate that innovative actors and practices form part of the local community mostly on the structural level, functionally making their presence felt to a lesser extent.

Keywords: embeddedness, innovative agricultural enterprises, Szeklerland

Introduction

The issues around the social embeddedness of economic undertakings have long been subject of professional analyses (Polányi 2001, Granovetter 1985); a separate branch of such analyses concerns the enterprises operating in rural areas (e.g. Hinrics 2000, Jack–Anderson 2002). According to Jack–Anderson (2002: 468): “embeddedness, identified as the nature, depth, and extent of an individual’s ties into the environment, has recently been commented upon as a configurating element of general business process”. The term embeddedness is a keyword in social sciences

and could be used to describe and understand the individual's activity in the field of economy (Dudek 2016: 206). In connection with the appreciation of rural areas and with the new rural development paradigm (Van der Ploeg 1994, Van der Ploeg et al. 2000, Murdoch 2000, Ward 2002, OECD 2006, Bosworth–Willett 2011) gaining ground, the investigation of the issues around social embeddedness also extended to the examination of innovative agricultural enterprises (Dudek 2016, Lombardi et al. 2015, Gezelius 2014, Aldrich–Cliff 2003, Boonstra et al. 2011, Commandeur 2006, Schifani et al. 2016, Cederholm–Johansson 2019, Müller–Korsgaard 2018, Kietavainen 2013, McKeever et al. 2014, 2015, Fischer–Burton 2014).

The term social innovation in the agriculture is frequently used in the context of rural development, where “the social is presented as a core element of innovation, also in the sense of engaging society in developing new solutions” (Bock 2012: 59). From this point of view, the innovative agricultural actors in our study are agricultural entrepreneurs, young farmers whose activities are innovative in content (new agricultural production) and technology (Biró 2016: 13).

As regards enterprises operating in the region of Szeklerland, there have not been launched any regular research programmes so far on the social embeddedness patterns of enterprises. In this region, the number of innovative agricultural initiatives has increased dramatically during the past decade. Seeing the novelty of these innovative initiatives in the context of the region's social and economic environment logically raises the need for a research on the processes and patterns of social inclusion.

Pro Agricultura Hargitae Universitas Foundation and WAC – Centre for Regional and Anthropological Research, both organizations operating in Miercurea Ciuc, have been engaged in projects on agricultural innovation processes in Szeklerland since 2011 (Biró–Magyar 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, Biró 2017). Along the lines of the already mentioned series of research projects as well as based upon the analysis of the interview series made with the innovative agricultural actors, our analysis examines the relationship between innovative initiatives and the immediate, local social environment. In rural areas, as it is the case of the region under investigation, there is a prominent question as to whether novel agricultural enterprises can generate actual social innovation on a local scale or within the region. We believe that analysing the development of local-scale embeddedness processes can partially address this question. We examine those attempts and patterns of embeddedness in the local communities that function in the objectives and practices of novel agricultural enterprises. Based on relevant literature and on the specificities of the research context, the study summarizes our research results in three areas as follows: local-scale structural embeddedness, practical embeddedness, and ideas of innovative actors on their future role within the local community.

Theoretical Aspects: Embeddedness in Rural Context

Approaches on the economic processes and development possibilities of rural areas often touch upon innovative initiatives that are based on local conditions and values, prioritize health promotion and environment protection in product manufacturing, and aim at creating and operating short supply chains during their sales processes (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000, Murdoch 2000, Ward 2002, Shucksmith 2010). Analysts as well as policy-makers expert on the subject, public figures, and media actors alike treat these innovative agricultural enterprises very often as bottom-up initiatives. It might be also worth considering Floysand and Sjøholt's (2007) line of argument, who point out the fact that innovative agricultural actors operating in rural environment find themselves in a new situation as global processes interfere with the rural environment. It follows that, on the one hand, the activities of these actors are realized at the meeting point/intersection of the global and the local, while, on the other hand, the innovative actors must position themselves outwards as well as inwards. They do not merely function as production sites/production depots in the rural medium, but they intend to make an impact on the immediate environment. They consider essential that the rural environment accept and appreciate their innovative activities, and they also endeavour to develop forms of cooperation with their environment. This means that for innovative agricultural enterprises operating in rural environments social embeddedness is more than an immediate economic benefit, and the extent and manner of embeddedness make an inherent part of the operation of businesses. Therefore, it can be concluded that if we are to look into the *modus operandi* and the social role of the innovative agricultural enterprises operating in rural areas, then we must necessarily take embeddedness under scrutiny.

In relation to the social embeddedness of enterprises, Polányi (2001) highlighted that all economies are embedded into some sort of network, economic or non-economic institution through their personal relationships. In his frequently cited work, Granovetter (1985) also emphasized the importance of social embeddedness as well as the fact that economic activity is determined by those relationships of the actors that are determined/shaped by their environment. In this context, several such approaches were elaborated later that make possible the description of economic actors' attitudes and that call attention upon other forms of embeddedness besides the structural one, such as cognitive, cultural, political, temporal, network-related, or institutional embeddedness (e.g. Uzzi 1997, Jack–Anderson 2002, Zukin–DiMaggio 1990).

Nowadays, there is a great number of professional analyses dealing with the social embeddedness of agricultural enterprises operating in rural areas, and there are several typologies in circulation (for an overview, see Dudek 2016). Jack and Anderson (2002) divide the process of embeddedness into three parts:

understanding the nature of the structure, enacting or re-enacting this structure, and maintaining both the link and the structure. Under this approach, embeddedness is a development process where mutuality, authenticity, knowledge, and experience are determined in a social space (Zahra 2017). Social embeddedness is highly essential from the point of view of entrepreneurial performance as well since it is a mechanism that helps the entrepreneur in identifying the resources in a socialized environment (Hansen 1995, Hite 2005). This approach goes beyond the short-term profit maximization, and it looks at groups and relationships in perspective (Aldrich-Cliff 2003). According to Uzzi (1997), embedded enterprises and entrepreneurs have a competitive advantage against their counterparts that are not embedded. Social context, informal clusters provide entrepreneurial attitude with a moral framework: entrepreneurial processes enjoy a broader support. At the same time, some authors (e.g. Gedajlovic et al. 2013) claim that embeddedness has its own price, which is not favourable in all of its aspects: this includes, for instance, danger of closure, tension during cooperation, resulting in psychological pressure on the entrepreneur.

The issues around the social embeddedness of innovative agricultural enterprises can be associated with the appreciation of rural areas, with the new rural development paradigm gaining ground and with the view coming increasingly to the fore that attaches more importance to an agricultural enterprise operating in the rural area and making its *début* as an innovation in the rural context than it would to a simple economic activity (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000, Murdoch 2000). We believe that Zahra's (2007) argument may be of crucial importance: regarding innovative agricultural enterprises, it understands the formation of the various patterns of social embeddedness as a development process. Today's professional approaches on studies dealing with the social embeddedness of innovative agricultural enterprises offer useful perceptions and methodological starting-points for the analysis of agricultural innovation processes in Szeklerland as well as for the elaboration of development policy ideas pertaining to this process.

The Regional Context

The following chapter is based on more than two decades of research materials of WAC – Centre for Regional and Anthropological Research in Miercurea Ciuc, especially on household surveys (2004, 2011) and the Szeklerland Foresight Programme (2008). The results of these research programmes on rural competitiveness issues are summarized by Biró and Magyar (2013).

Szeklerland is a rural area situated in the central part of Romania, has no administrative boundaries, and is made up of small towns – with 10–50,000 inhabitants – and their catchment areas. As for the region, several historical, socio-historical, political, and public policy definitions and descriptions have been

worked out that emphasize the antecedents of the region's historical independence, its ethnical character (a great proportion of the inhabitants are Hungarians), and its specific development potential. Nevertheless, the description of the region's current situation and its social processes is quite incomplete. There are several versions in circulation regarding the size of its territory (Harghita and Covasna counties and part of Mureş County) and its population (a frequently used number in this respect is 600,000), while very strong ambitions have been formulated in the area of regional identity building in the past one-and-a-half decades. In what follows, we will make an indicative presentation of the regional characteristics that are particularly important to our research topic.

Traditionally, the small-scale, subsistence family farming is typical of the region; more than 50% of the families are still landowners today and are running a farm as a principal or secondary activity. The size of the landed property is of a few hectares per family, and the fragmentation of the estates is a typical phenomenon for all families. This land tenure system was administratively terminated by the collectivization completed in Romania in the year 1962. Starting from the mid-1960s, the government established industrial enterprises in the region, and a substantial part of the population became industrial workers. Subsequent to the 1989 regime change, the individual land tenure system terminated in 1962 was restored, and the small-scale, self-sustaining agricultural activities affecting the overwhelming majority of the families were revived. Most of the families with land ownership carry out farming activities besides maintaining other jobs, the most important function of family farming activities being conversion into money; marketing is of an occasional nature, while product range and production technology undergo minor and very slow changes. In this sector, the process of land consolidation is extremely slow, the function of the land leasing system is minimal, and the forms of associations and cooperative societies are numerically negligible. Only a small number of operational farmlands have sprung up (for a more detailed overview of the topic, see: Laki–Biró 2001, Biró 2006, 2019).

In the context briefly outlined above, the past decade has seen a considerable number of novel agricultural enterprises that in their composition and modalities of operation as well are fundamentally distinct from the earlier, family-scale farming practices that are a dominant feature of the region. We consider it important to emphasize that this is not an internal innovation process. External factors stimulating innovation initiatives are of several types – these will be mentioned only briefly. The last decade can be marked as the period when such professional and public policy themes as well as institutional initiatives made their appearance on the regional level that encourage or support the production and distribution of local products. One part of such initiatives is organized in the context of economic enterprises (e.g. the so-called *Góbé* products), while some other part of them is realized through network or cluster support programmes operated by public institutions (see, for instance:

Szekler products or the *Agro Sic* programme). These processes are not independent from the global trends that are in connection with the appreciation of rural areas, developments grounded on endogenous conditions, the expansion of environmental awareness, a growing demand for healthy foods, and in general the new rural development paradigm and neo-endogenous development policy initiatives. It is partly through institutionalized knowledge transfer processes (university education, operation of the regional project élites, national and regional policy themes, support programmes for innovative target groups) and partly through individual/occasional experiences abroad that such knowledge has an impact on the regional development practices in the area and, linked to them, on agricultural innovation.

Indirectly, however, certain regional factors also contribute to the increasing appreciation of the role played by agricultural innovation processes. One significant reason for this is that the traditional model of the self-sufficient small family farms still prevailing to date does not offer opportunities for the further development of those open for innovative solutions. In the context of traditional family farming practices, those aspiring to move forward are constantly searching for new forms and operating models, first of all in response to examples and incentives coming from outside the region. The launching of small-scale and novel initiatives is implicitly supported by the fact that the extremely fragmented land tenure system characteristic of the region does not promote the broader expansion of operational farming. The consolidation process of local identity structures may be considered as a further incentive, providing an enabling framework for agricultural innovation experiments based upon endogenous values. The experience of recent years shows that regional consumer demand too has by today become supportive of innovative initiatives.

The space between traditional self-sustaining family farming model and operational farming has been serving as a spawning ground for an ever-growing number of innovative agricultural initiatives. We are talking about the production of produces and the use of production technologies that were previously missing altogether or merely existed as ancillary activities in regional farming practice (i.e. cultivation of medicinal plants, fruit farming and processing, rose cultivation, snail farming, mushroom growing, cheese making, worm farming, raising of small livestock, Mangalitsa farming, etc.). Furthermore, the manner of knowledge acquisition, the applied production technology, and marketing practices are worth mentioning as novel components. Innovative enterprises are substantially different from operational farms too, whose primary focus is on the quantity and profitability of production. They also significantly differ from the traditional family farming model, which is still typical of more than half of the households in the region and which is characteristically grounded on people's own knowledge on the one hand and marked by keeping distance from business/marketing aspects and practices on the other.

The key attributes of regional agricultural innovation initiatives are as follows:

- The necessary professional knowledge for starting a business is usually acquired from outside the region.

- Basically, they wish to make use of local, endogenous conditions and resources.

- They are committed to food safety, health promotion, and the protection of natural assets.

- They are open to professional, technological, and other types of modernizations.

- Production is not their sole interest as they also keep business considerations in view.

- They are also willing to share their knowledge and experiences with their immediate environment.

- Professional relationship management and image building are also incorporated into their activities.

- Greater entrepreneurship and business considerations are not among the top priorities as sustainability and utilization of local values take precedence.

- As a rule, they are explicitly connected to a local community (locality).

- For the time being, we may witness only a few such initiatives per settlement, some of them giving home to not more than one or two such innovative enterprises.

The juxtaposition of the farming model that is traditionally characteristic of the region and the innovative initiatives strongly indicates the difference and distance between the two types of farming practices and not the least the fact that innovative initiatives represent a significant challenge for local society. The extent of the difference between the two types of farming practices has a marked impact on the process of innovative enterprises' social embeddedness, and, in their view, it makes the examination of these processes justifiable.

Methodological Aspects

Our research results are grounded on eighty semi-structured interviews realized in the Szeklerland region between 2011 and 2019 as well as on personal fieldwork experiences within the framework of the research programme of Pro Agricultura Hargitae Universitas Foundation and WAC – Centre for Regional and Anthropological Research (Biró–Magyar 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). The main topics and aspects of the data collection work and analysis were the following:

- circumstances in which the activity started (when it started, what effect or incentive it took, how it started, what were the conditions initially);

- individual and family farming experiences, learning history in the education system;

- acquisition and status of professional knowledge required for an innovative initiative (agricultural technology and other professional knowledge, managerial knowledge, endogenous/local knowledge);
- relationship to the immediate environment;
- network connections;
- positioning practice of own activity (content, methods, procedures and tools for positioning one's own activity, positioning activity, product, personality, work process).
- use of subsidies (national, county, local banks and the type, role, and effect of subsidies in farming);
- what the interviewee considers to be an important problem or topic to be solved (regulation, administration, national or regional policy, local program, learning, etc.);
- progress scenarios (area, activity, conditions, timeframe);
- opinion on the situation in the region: the situation and opportunities of young agricultural entrepreneurs in the Szeklerland region.

The current analysis considers the relationship of the initiative/enterprise with the immediate environment. When conducting the interviews, we asked about the relationship between the given initiative/enterprise and the local community and the path this relationship had covered from the very beginning. Innovative agricultural actors are incessantly preoccupied with questions around the attitude local society has towards them. As postulated by Gergen and Gergen (2001), narratives created under these circumstances are considered such narratives of the self that members of the innovative group generate and maintain in relation to their own immediate environment. In these contexts, the creation of narratives takes place with the aim of projecting the further development of this relationship, pursuing the justification of their own activities, and maintaining the already established structural relationship (Gergen–Gergen 2001: 80). As a rule, such narratives – as the authors highlight – are guided by events and can be considered rather social than individual processes. This last remark also points to the fact that the structure of these narratives is determined by conventions related to the creation of texts of this nature. *Inter alia*, one of its essential constituents is the existence of “valued endpoint” (Gergen–Gergen 2001: 80–81), which presumes some sort of summarizing/closing evaluation regarding the given relationship.

In the situations under our consideration, prioritizing the narratives of the self is warranted by several factors – first of all, that innovative actors do not merely recognize that they differ in several aspects from their immediate environment, but they consciously seek ways of experiencing diversity or of materializing this diversity for their environment. In this way, for instance, they produce other products than local farmers do, build their activities on other (external) knowledge, use different technologies, hold other norms and values important, and so on. At the same time,

they enhance and publicly display this otherness in texts, attitude, clothing, etc. As a consequence, the manifestation and interpretation of the relationship with the local environment is constantly on the agenda. Besides that, what also brings the interpretive practices of the own activities and situation to the fore is the fact that in some cases members of the local community are acting distant and express some reservations and criticisms regarding the new initiatives, and this is yet another experience that leads to forced interpretation in the camp of the innovative actors.

Regarding the narratives of the various patterns of embeddedness in the local society, we found that the interview subjects do not only speak about how they integrate into the local environment, into the natural and social conditions but also touch upon their attempts in terms of their relationship or cooperation with the local community and what results or lessons these attempts have entailed. What is more, they often venture to give voice to their expectations and proposals on social embeddedness.

Professional works on economic actors' social embeddedness suggest multiple levels of analysis. A highly useful review study in this regard is Michal Dudek's (2016) work, where the author distinguishes four major types of embeddedness as suggested by a closer inspection of the approaches found in the specialized literature: cognitive, structural, cultural, and political embeddedness. The author's own model of interpretation – based on the results of a rather comprehensive research programme carried out in Poland – includes eight factors. The various approaches and typologies call attention to the complex and dynamic nature of the embeddedness processes, to the fact that embeddedness is such a complex development process wherein the evolution of mutuality, authenticity, knowledge, and experiences is shaped by the given social space (Zahra 2007). Our study presents the patterns of embeddedness on a local scale. However, based on the performed fieldwork, we can identify two factors that account for the possibility and importance of local-scale analysis. One of them is the prominent role of localities that arises from their particular, socio-historical antecedents, while the other one stems from the nature of the examined innovative initiatives: these agricultural innovations are small-scale initiatives, are in their early development phase, are in many ways only slightly formalized, and consider in many respects the local context as the most important operating and reference environment.

Results

Based on relevant literature and the research context, in the region under our examination, there are three analytical themes that seem to be expedient on the local level: local-scale structural embeddedness, practical initiatives, and ideas of innovative actors on their future role within the local community.

Local-scale structural embeddedness refers to those coincidences, common points, and operating modes between the family farming model predominantly present in these local societies on the one hand and the innovative initiative on the other that tone down the strangeness of the new initiative and make this new initiative part of the local milieu. The issues of practical initiatives and programmes refer to those instances of cooperation or collaboration opportunities that the innovative agricultural actor develops or intends to develop with the local society. The third form of social embeddedness is that part of the discursive practice which concerns the innovative actors' future role.

Patterns of Structural Embeddedness

The relationship between innovative agricultural actors and the local society includes several components that either implicitly or explicitly indicate that the specific innovative initiative belongs to the local society as well, forms part of it. In what follows, mainly based on Dudek's (2016) and Zahra's (2007) work and embeddedness typologies presented below, we will present six components of this kind.

There are several features of innovative initiatives that can be found in the locally dominant family farming models too and that convey the message that new initiatives are not novel or uncommon in every respect, but they share resemblances with the well-known and already adopted local models. Some of the characteristic examples suggest that a novel initiative can be in certain respects interpreted as part of the local society: farming dimensions (size of the territory, farm buildings, machinery, etc.) are similar to those of family farms; the majority of the workforce in innovative enterprises is ensured by the family members; they function in the same local physical and social space; relationship with the local community does not change completely; it is typical of innovative enterprises as well that they do not show rapid and notable increase in wealth. Detecting such similarities is essential with regard to embeddedness since these will help members of the local community to find reference points for the interpretation of new initiatives. These patterns of embeddedness are not outcomes of conscious actions, and they suggest for the local community that the specific innovative agricultural enterprise partly belongs to the local society, forms part of it, and is not completely unfamiliar to it.

It has previously been suggested that innovative actors attach importance to self-definition, to describing their novel activities, and to placing emphasis on the local-scale unique character of their personality. Activities of self-definition contribute to their differentiation from the local environment, to their display of "otherness". It is a rather intriguing development, however, that they link this self-definition to elements that form an integral part of the local context, that pertain to locality, and that are known by members of the local society. Typical examples and solutions are:

– They point out that the legacy of the parents (ancestors) must be preserved, must be carried on, and their activity can also be seen as the continuation of the parents' activities. They express these as their conviction ("one should not let go to waste what the parents have earned"), or they evoke specific assets (they retain land ownership and livestock passed down from their parents and make use of the inherited farm buildings).

– They stress their belonging to the given settlement, emphasizing that they were born there, and they work towards its benefit.

– They argue that they wish to build the novel initiative on the exploitation of conditions and values available in this region, in this settlement.

– Sustainability is underlined as a priority issue for them in operating the enterprise, which thus takes precedence over quick profit-making ventures, just as safe operation does over economic growth.

– They point out that they do not wish to be markedly different, to become separated (apart from the fact that they have different products and apply a distinct production technology as well).

An essential element of local-scale embeddedness is the tendency that innovative agricultural actors describe themselves as models to be followed for the local society. It is important for them to show an example in issues such as respect for the land, love of the natural environment, healthy lifestyle, ensuring self-sufficiency, technological modernization, self-education, etc. They are convinced that the venture they have chosen is a useful and beneficial solution in this social environment and that others too should fall in line behind them – and this shift does not cover farming practices alone but attitudes and assumed value systems as well.

The vast majority of innovative actors strives to assume or would at least want to lay claim to a leading role on the local level. Obviously, this is just an informal role – for now, this acts more often as part of the self-definition than something experienced in everyday practice. The narrative construction of the leading role is reflected in taking pride in their activities, in the authenticity and novelty of these activities, and thus in quasi positioning themselves above the local society.

Efforts made towards social embeddedness are also indicated by the fact that interview subjects believe that knowing one's immediate environment is important. Although they acknowledge dismissive and distanced attitudes as well, they ascribe them to a lack of knowledge or unfounded hostility and treat them as temporary negative phenomena. They identify or even interpret the barriers standing in the way of local embeddedness.

They resort to specific methods in dealing with arguments related to the regional relevance and the timeliness of organic farming. Only a minor share of these arguments represents the more widely circulating and trendy explanations (protect the environment, have healthy foods, etc.). The larger part of the reason is fuelled by the local context, and with this course of action they try to link the new initiative

to the local society. It is not their parents' but their grandparents' practices that they bring forward as a background for their activities since these ancestors would practice nature-friendly farming, "without the use of chemicals". Reference to the earlier "natural" state as well as linking this earlier state with today's values support the social embeddedness of innovative initiatives.

Practical Patterns of Embeddedness

Initiatives establishing or strengthening social embeddedness are diverse in terms of content, form, systematicity, size, aims, and sustainability alike. As we have earlier indicated, these initiatives are based upon the innovative agricultural actors' personal attitude and resources.

Some of the typical examples are as follows:

- Providing occasional or permanent job opportunities for members of the local community and emphasizing in this context that this practice aims at helping the locals.

- Initiating and developing forms of production cooperation with families that are willing to adopt the innovative actors' production technology as well as the supervision thereof.

- Using own resources to organize local events that are structured along the principles and values assumed by the innovative agricultural actor. These may be programmes specifically related to the entrepreneur's field of activity, but they can also venture to take on a broader context.

- Providing occasional or regular counselling for the local family farms in issues of technology or on launching new enterprises. One type of such assistance is when it is the representative of the innovation him-/herself who undertakes the activity, while in other cases s/he takes on this task upon request. In both aforementioned versions, the innovative actor's willingness comes to the fore, showing that s/he is ready to perform such tasks or comply with requests of this kind and is happy to contribute.

- Knowledge transfer, instruction upon occasional requests or even in an organized or institutionalized form.

- Providing professional technology service on an ad-hoc basis or regularly for farmers engaged in a similar field of activity.

- Using the name of the settlement in sales and marketing activities. This is an especially valuable assistance for such small, marginalized settlements that are not known for any other local values or events.

- Appearance at the local product market.

The examples listed above clearly show that the innovative actor is the key figure of such initiatives whether s/he him/herself undertakes to launch the programme or acts upon request or solicitation. It is also quite apparent from the list that

these initiatives are occasional in nature and not institutionalized. With very few exceptions, they do not fit into the local institutions and their programmes. The unique and temporary nature, however, does not detract from the social role and usefulness of these initiatives as the evaluations produced by the local community consider the innovative actors' personality and activity altogether as a frame of reference, not only the concrete event or programme in itself. The assessment of all such specific initiatives is integrated into the local knowledge base developed in relation to the innovative agricultural actor. Therefore, local embeddedness may also be consolidated if the innovative actor employs only one or two persons, gets into contact with the locals sporadically, and gives lectures or advice on rare occasions. In what concerns the development of local embeddedness, it is not the quantity or variety of the initiatives that counts but the fact that the local community perceives this sort of attitude on the part of the innovative actor. By way of such cooperation, the innovative agricultural actor becomes part of the local identity (Uzzi 1997, Zahra 2007).

Expected/Future Role in the Local Community

Regarding the further development of local-scale social embeddedness processes, the innovative actors' standpoint and further engagement ideas are of great importance. So far, there has not been launched any regional professional programme or institutional initiative that would deal with supporting the innovative actors' social embeddedness. Speaking on a local scale, it partly falls on the local society to carry these embeddedness processes forward by gradually reducing the estrangement generated towards innovative initiatives and increasing openness and willingness to cooperate. However, this supposes a passive and inclusive role, and it will only lead to real changes if the agricultural actors themselves act as agents, seek cooperation, and initiate programmes. The question "Would you personally undertake some sort of role in the settlement to promote the greater penetration of agricultural innovation?" evoked meaningful and firm answers from most interview subjects, the manner of their responses being also highly indicative of the fact that such questions cannot catch them off guard, and they will have no difficulty answering them.

The responses clearly indicate that they are fully aware of their own role as a local élite, that they possess a certain knowledge and have an experience that might be essential for their environment. We will find no answers along the lines of "I cannot help" or "I am not suitable for or capable of such achievements". Whenever they distance themselves from assuming such roles or express some reservations regarding this type of engagement, they claim that they have a busy schedule, make mention of earlier negative experiences, or argue that there is no real need for such engagement to take place.

Summary

Based on a set of interviews, the present study was an attempt at addressing the analysis of the relationship between innovative agricultural initiatives and the immediate social environment, examining in three areas the relationship of innovative agricultural actors and the local society. Relying on relevant literature criteria, analysing the development of embeddedness processes proved to be an appropriate method to answer the question as to what attempts and patterns of embeddedness in the local communities function in the objectives and practices of novel agricultural enterprises in the Szeklerland region. The study presented three local-scale embeddedness patterns as follows: structural embeddedness, practical embeddedness patterns, and the interview subjects' opinion on their future engagements.

Considering the region under scrutiny, the social embeddedness of the innovative agricultural initiatives is an experimental, transitory process. Embeddedness comprises a variety of patterns, but these are mere attempts in nature, carrying no features of institutionalization, and their effectiveness is uncertain. Nevertheless, the greater part of embeddedness processes develops in the wake of the innovative agricultural actors' initiatives and activities, the local society taking on a passive role in this respect. As a result, the innovative agricultural initiatives partly belong to the local society and are partly considered to be foreign elements, having a marginalized status from a local perspective. Another important conclusion of the study is that narrative practice plays an important role in the analysed target group. Considering the variety and frequency of the narratives, the studied agricultural actors are agents who make efforts towards positioning themselves and their activities on the local scale amidst diffuse and constantly changing conditions.

The concrete forms of embeddedness under analysis point to the fact that innovative actors and practices make part of the local community rather on the structural level, while functionally their presence is evident to a lesser degree. Innovative agricultural actors exert influence on their environment both expressly and implicitly. This state of affairs applies to knowledge (transfer) and attitude alike.

In terms of regional development, the studied innovative group's most important feature that also requires further, more detailed analysis is that the members of this group operate on the interface of global processes and local structures; more specifically, they are the very creators of this interface by virtue of their activities, attitudes, principles, and values. Further essential areas of analysis in this region are as follows: exploring the structural and personal barriers of embeddedness, carrying out a detailed examination focusing on the creation and operation of self-image, and investigating the processes of change with regard to community attitudes.

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