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The role of farm diversification and peasant habitus for farm resilience in mountain areas: the case of the Ötztal valley, Austria

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Abstract: *By examining a case study in Tyrol, Austria, the paper aims to demonstrate the role of farm diversification into on- and off farm work and the influence of the peasants' habitus on social-ecological resilience. Drawing on a field study conducted in two remote villages of the Ötztal valley, Austrian Alps, this study provides insights into the interplay of tourism and farming and its impact on farm resilience. Qualitative narrative interviews, so-called farm biographies, served to investigate these issues. Interpretations of data are based on qualitative content analysis. The results highlight that farming and tourism are highly enmeshed in the case study area and that the additional income creates room for manoeuvre for the farms to activate their adaptive capability. At the same time, peasant values guide the farming activities. The farms in this study demonstrate a strong farm resilience that is enabled by farm diversification and rooted in their peasant habitus. This positively affects the social-ecological resilience.*

Keywords: *tourism, European Alps, social-ecological resilience*

Introduction

Farming in the European Alps is based on family farming and provides not only livelihoods for individual families, but shapes the aesthetically appreciated cultural landscape for recreational and touristic uses and is further an asset of cultural heritage (Flury *et al.*, 2013). Further, a multifunctional agriculture preserves several types of ecosystem services, such as an aesthetically appreciated landscape or the provision of energy from renewable resources. Furthermore, farming has an impact on social cohesion and viable rural regions (Renting *et al.*, 2008) and therewith on rural development. However, the declining importance of food production in less favoured areas encourages, not to say forces, farmers to adapt their farm labour to add value to production through depending or broadening their farming activities to be resilient (van der Ploeg, 2009).

In Austria, nearly 60% of farmland is managed by 147,313 family farms (BMNT, 2019). They differ from other types of farming (such as group holdings or corporate farms) by focusing not just on the economic aspect of agriculture, as it "is not only an occupation in which capital, land and labour are used to produce agricultural output, but also a lifestyle based on and involving beliefs about living and working on the farm" (Calus and van Huylenbroeck, 2010: 654). Most of the smaller farms in mountain areas have been family-run for generations. Given the unfavourable natural conditions, they lack alternative production possibilities, *e.g.* arable farming or fruit growing. Technical modernization and breeding progress to raised productivity exceed the financial scope of many family farms. Thus, to maintain the farm, many farmers had to look for off-farm employment and became part-time farmers (*e.g.* in 2016: 59.3% part-time farms in Tyrol, 55% in Austria) (Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung, 2019).

Since the beginning of tourism in the European Alps, it has contributed significantly to rural livelihoods of a rather poor farming society. The rise of mass tourism since the 1950s was a driver of repopulation and economic revitalization in many Alpine communities (Barker, 1982). For remote mountain areas especially, tourism is the main source of income. There are essentially five options to integrate farm activities in the tourism industry. First, farms provide agritourism services, including accommodation, activities, produce and experiences, to generate additional on-farm income. In addition to the traditional farm-based accommodation, several farms also run hotels or pensions decoupled from their farms (Stotten *et al.*, 2019). For both approaches, the diversification into accommodation services demands other skills, competencies, and endowment. This further affects the social identity of a farm family and

alienates it from traditional farm culture (Brandth and Haugen, 2011). Data from 2010 indicate that 11% of guest beds in Austria were provided by farms (BMNT, 2019). As one-third of all farms in the federal state of Tyrol offer accommodation services, it constitutes an important pillar of income. A second source of additional income is off-farm employment in tourism. Winter is a slack period for farming, while winter tourism is the backbone of tourism in Austria, and especially in Tyrol. Thus, employment in tourism is synergetic in terms of labour demand. Farmers often work in slope grooming and ski lift services, as skiing instructors or in other tourism-related activities (*e.g.* show dairy, carriage rides). Additionally, farmers (mostly female) are involved in the hospitality service sector. However, this strategy also puts an additional burden on the farm family. A third potential linkage is the provision of high-quality food products for high-end restaurants and tourists within the region. This deepens the relationship between food producers and food consumers in general (Sidali *et al.*, 2013). A fourth contribution of tourism is the increased awareness of the role of farming in landscape maintenance and other cultural ecosystem services (like aesthetics) by the public (Arriaza *et al.*, 2004). This is a major justification for public transfer payments and may translate into regional compensation for farmland management. Fifth, most of the touristic winter activities, like Alpine or Nordic skiing, take place on farmland, thus tourist associations or ski lift operators have to pay compensation for the right to use farmland for ski slopes or cross-country skiing trails (Gattermayer, 1992).
The resulting symbiosis of agriculture and tourism stabilizes the ongoing structural change in certain rural areas somewhat (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Schermer *et al.*, 2016) and contributes to the public awareness of the value of farming in general (Tew and Barbieri, 2012). Nevertheless, tourism activities are not a panacea for maintaining farming, since much tourism in Austria takes place in agriculturally less favoured areas. Based on this context, the paper answers the following research questions:

- How does farm diversification into tourism enable family farms to activate different farm resilience capabilities?
- What is the role of peasant habitus for the resilience of family farms?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, a farm is defined as a unit consisting of the farm family (with their “mental models, preferences, goals, abilities, etc., making up its social and cultural capital) and the physical farm (with a variety of subsystems, including land, animals, crops, building, finances, etc., making up its natural and economic capital)” (Darnhofer *et al.*, 2011, pp.187-188). This study focuses on family farms as it is the prevailing model of farm organization in the Alpine area. In this study a farm is considered with its social as well as ecological functions, which form a social-ecological system. For family farms the differentiation between the terms ‘farmer’ (Landwirt / Landwirtin) and ‘peasant’ (Bauer / Bäuerin) is of importance. Whereas this distinction has almost disappeared in the English-speaking world, in the German-speaking world it is significant. The English definition of a farmer relies on a productivist entrepreneurial model, whereas peasant farming os often considered as a synonym for small-scale family farming (Edelmann, 2013) Teodor Shanin (1973) defines peasantry by four interlinked distinguishing features: the family farm as the basic multi-functional unit of social organisation; land husbandry as the basis for livelihood; a traditional culture closely linked to small rural communities; and multi-directional subjection to powerful outsiders. Later, van der Ploeg (2009) highlights peasantry as a counter-model to industrial or ‘entrepreneurial’ farming. Thus, peasants are rooted in the locality, struggling for autonomy, reduce capital intensification, and apply resource-based sustainable food production and distribution practices.
Different social groups exhibit distinct modes of action. Bourdieu (1979) explains the similarities of the "modus operandi" (ibid., p.189) within a certain social group as their habitus. He (Bourdieu, 1974) defines this term as the inherent system of dispositions that is shaped by our experiences and interaction with past events and is further influenced by current practices and structures. Such a system of dispositions manifests itself in individual or collective attitudes, which are passed through generations within families or other social groups. Even if he does not describe habitus as static, he refers to its

inertia with the hysteresis effect, as tacit habits shaped in the primary socialization hardly change later. Like every human activity, farm management is influenced by habitus (*e.g.* Burton *et al.*, 2008; Stotten, 2015; Darnhofer *et al.*, 2011), which expresses itself in attitudes and practices of good farming and is transmitted by peasants of different generations on a farm, as well as by neighbours or other local institutions. Habitual actions are less guided by rationality, scientific information or objective evaluation, than by inherent guidelines of how to be a peasant. However, there are multiple forms of peasant habitus (Schallberger, 1999) based on different experiences, anchored in diverse cultural settings. Nevertheless, one important asset of the peasant habitus relies on the activity of working the land as well as autonomy about the farming practice.

Based on Holling's (1973) notion that the capability of a system to manage or cope with change is crucial, Walker *et al.* (2004) define resilience as "the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise [itself] while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks" (p.2). Referring to these ideas, Darnhofer (2014) distinguishes "buffer capability, adaptive capability and transformative capability" (p.467) of farms. She argues that a farm is resilient when it is able to navigate adaptive cycles by employing these three capabilities. These cycles are not necessarily triggered by an occasional event, rather they are ongoing processes. The buffering capability refers to the absorption of shocks and turbulences. Therefore, a farm must be able, for example, to fall back on financial resources in times of low income, without changing the farm's structure. The adaptive capability is expressed in the adaptation of the system while staying in the same regime. Regarding social resilience, human capital such as skills, knowledge, labour ability and health status is of importance (Baffoe, 2018). An example of such capability would be changes in farm management (*e.g.* diversification into tourism activities) which are not provoked by a shock or by disturbances but applied as a proactive resilience strategy (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016). This might be the adaptation of livestock farming, workload, land use, the introduction of new technologies, or the exploration of new sales channels. However, the basic functions of the system remain. Another expression of farm resilience according to Darnhofer (2014) is the transformative capability, when, in reaction to a disturbance, a radical change is implemented and a transition is made into a new system, *e.g.* the conversion from conventional to organic farming. This transformation includes changes in the perceptions and values of the farm family and its integration into social networks (Lamine, 2011). Considering social-ecological systems, some might be resilient from a social perspective but are ecologically vulnerable, and vice versa (Folke, 2006). Here it is of importance that social resilience is highly dependent on intact social relations (*e.g.* within the community, family), institutions (*e.g.* support through agricultural policy), identities (*e.g.* practiced in farming communities) and economic mechanisms (*e.g.* enabling local food supply chains) (Milestad and Hadatsch, 2003).

Farms of this study (see empirical evidence as well as Table 1) rely on low-intensive animal husbandry systems, where a change from conventional to organic farming would not include major changes in the system (López-i-Gelats *et al.*, 2011). Other radical changes, such as from livestock to arable farming, are not possible in this area, due to topographic and climatic restrictions. However, as most of the farms have diversified into tourism, a transformation into a system solely based on tourism is obvious, though radical, as it entails a new equilibrium of the social-ecological system. Therefore, for this study, a farm is considered as non-resilient when it has undergone the transformation into a completely new system (*e.g.* from part-time farming into full-time tourism provider) as a reaction to a disturbance, a shock or as a proactive strategy. This is because the social system will have completely changed to another set of values and other integration into social networks (*e.g.* tourism association). In contrast, most of the released farmland would be taken over and continue to be farmed by other farms in the village so that from the ecological perspective it does not affect the resilience.

Case Study Area

A field study in the Ötztal valley (Tyrol, Austrian Alps) provides empirical insights into the interplay of tourism and farming and its impact on farm resilience. Agriculture in Tyrol continues to play an important role, as it is an integral part of the Tyrolean culture and indispensable for maintaining the cultural

landscape. Following a decline in agricultural units in recent decades, in 2016, Tyrol had about 15,000 farms, of which about 4,200 are full-time and about 9,200 are part-time family. Agriculture is largely based on animal husbandry, which is mainly dairy farming and raising breeding stock for sale on auctions (especially in mountain areas). Agricultural diversification, such as agritourism and direct marketing, accounts for a significant proportion (16.5%) of total agricultural output for the area (Land Tirol, 2017).

The integration of tourism and farming was examined in two remote villages, Vent and Obergurgl at the head of the Ötztal valley. The valley of Vent is very narrow and flanked by steep slopes. It leads to a valley floor in the village of Vent (1,895 m asl). The valley leading to the village of Obergurgl (1,907 m asl) is wide, with gentler slopes than in the valley of Vent. Originally, both were typical Alpine agrarian communities based on livestock farming. Tourism started as early as in the 19th century. In the beginning, tourists were attracted by glaciers and the proglacial lakes. Even then – forced by the crisis in mountain farming caused by industrialization - farmers hosted tourists in their houses and served as mountain guides to sustain their livelihoods (Scharr, 2013). Ski tourism in Obergurgl evolved in the mid-20th century and it developed into an internationally recognized skiing destination, with significantly lower numbers of tourists in the summer season. In contrast, the skiing facilities of Vent are relatively small. However, the village focuses on mountaineering activities and is today classified as a mountaineering village, which results in an economic balance of summer and winter seasons. Thus both villages depend heavily on tourism that again depends on an intact habitat, as other economic activity is of little importance in the whole valley. In 2019 Obergurgl had little more than 500 inhabitants, among them 15 active farmers. The population in Vent was around 140, with eight active farmers (STATISTIK AUSTRIA, 2020). Even if part-time farming is dominant in the Ötztal as a whole, there are still some full-time farmers (see Table I). Farming is mostly based on animal husbandry, with the majority in sheep and cattle farming, as the natural conditions are not favourable for arable farming.

Method

To gain information about farm resilience, narrative or biographical interviews, called farm biographies for this study, were conducted with farmers. The interviews aim to enable the participant to narrate their experiences around the study theme. With a narrative generating introductory question, the interviewer stimulates the participant to express his or her experiences through descriptions. After a narrative phase, the interviewer asks immanent questions, relying on aspects mentioned by the participant, to initiate a continuing narration and to clarify uncertainties. Prepared issues of interest might be addressed during the last part of the interview (Küsters, 2009).

In total, there are 22 farms in the case study area. Nine of them were selected according to diversity aspects and suggestions[1] for deeper investigation. The opening question asked for a narration on the farm development, especially during the last 40-50 years. Thereupon, immanent questions were posed. As prepared issues of interest, questions on aspects of resilience, such as (additional) income, investments, participation in local cultural associations, and change in land use, had been arranged. A timeline made of cardboard and starting in the 1970s helped the farmers to express and accentuate specific moments for their farms, which were noted directly on paper arrows during the interview. This helped to visualize the development of the farm for the farmers and to trigger a deeper reflection. In total, nine interviews were conducted (5 in Obergurgl, 4 in Vent, see table 1). The farm biographies with the farmers were done between November 2017 and June 2018 at their respective farms and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

For data analysis, the qualitative content analysis served to systematically describe the meaning of qualitative data. This rule-guided and theoretically grounded step-by-step approach to qualitative text analysis is based on the inductive development of categories close to the given text material and a deductive verification of those categories in terms of the research questions and theory (Mayring, 2007).

[1] Suggested during previous expert interviews conducted in the same project with a focus on community resilience among local stakeholders of both villages

For the development of the categories, the software ATLAS.ti was used to organize and code the text material.

Farm	Location		Farm	Farm size (ha)			Additional income of the household[1]	Self-estimation division of household income
				1990	2000	2010[2]		in %
1	Vent	full-time	horse breeding, suckler cows	1198	640	34	(ski instructor, on-farm tourism)	100 farming
2	Vent	part-time	cattle, pigs, sheep	28	26	6	ski school, holiday apartments	8 farming, 80 additional income on-farm, 1 transit rights, rights of use, easement agreements, 11 other compensation
3	Obergurgl	part-time	goats, sheep, bees	19	19	4	wood carver, (ski instructor)	10 farming, 10 additional income on-farm, 65 additional income off-farm,
4	Obergurgl	part-time	cattle, chicken	34	8	7	bed and breakfast, (ski instructor)	10 farming, 80 additional income on-farm, 10 transit rights, rights of use, easement agreements, 5 other compensation
5	Obergurgl	part-time	cattle, sheep, pigs, alpaca	20	20	7	ski school, holiday apartments, land leasing	9 farming, 60 additional income on-farm, 10 additional income off-farm, 20 transit rights, rights of use, easement agreements, 1 other compensation
6	Obergurgl	part-time	highland cattle	-	-	10	ski instructor, holiday apartments	0 farming, 35 additional income on-farm, 45 additional income off-farm, 15 transit rights, rights of use, easement agreements, 5 other compensation
7	Vent	part-time	cattle, sheep, goats, horses	42	16	22	ski instructor, carriage rides, stable tours, holidays on the farm, teacher (farm wife)	20 farming, 50 additional income on-farm, 30 additional income off-farm
8	Vent	part-time	horses, goats, suckler cows	26	29	6	holiday apartments, mountain cabin	5 farming, 90 additional income on-farm, 5 transit rights, rights of use, easement agreements
9	Obergurgl	part-time	sheep, goats	41	40	0	bed and breakfast	100 bed and breakfast

Table 1. Characteristics of the participating farms. *1. In brackets earlier occupations of the farmers. 2. The decline in mountain pastures from 2010 goes back to a change in capturing mountain forage areas. Prior to 2010, the areas submitted within the agricultural structure survey had always been those of the cadastral map of mountain pastures.*

Results & Discussion

In total, the six categories were developed from the nine biographies: farm diversification, disturbances, buffering, adaptation, and transformation strategies, as well as habitus. Below, the results of those categories are discussed according to the research questions.

How does farm diversification into tourism enable family farms to activate different resilience capabilities?

The additional income generated through farm diversification activities into tourism relieves family farms from disturbances at global or national level, such as a financial crisis or changes in the CAP. Therefore, the farms mainly rely on their proactive adaptation strategies to ensure their survival. Disturbances that impact on farm resilience and require adaptation or buffering mainly occur on an individual level, such as loss of workforce or damage to farmland. The local resilience strategy in the upper Ötztal valley is integrating farming with tourism. In this way, multiple incomes raise the total income of the farm household and fund adaptation strategies. The farms of this study, however, demonstrated a variety of options and shades of farm diversification into tourism. By applying adaptation strategies, the investigated farms continuously optimize their farmland and their workload. As a double burden appears with farm diversification strategies, farms tend to extensify the farming activities to reduce the workload (see also López-i-Gelats *et al.*, 2011). Further, farms of this study would be able to apply the transformative strategy as Farm 9 did. In this case, the buffering strategy was depleted and the farm was not resilient anymore. However, the transformative capability enabled the farm family to sustain their livelihood and allows them to continue as a tourism provider. With a majority of the household income generated in farm diversification activities, most of the farms under investigation could apply such transformative capability in case the resilience of their individual farms came under pressure.
All investigated farms apply selected options to integrate farm activities with the tourism industry. Mostly, diversification strategies rely on accommodation services and off-farm employment in tourism. Interestingly, accommodation services are not obviously linked to farming activities or peasant culture, so that the farm itself is not necessary to keep a classic agritourism accommodation service running (see (Stotten *et al.*, 2019). Applied resilience strategies also make use of Obergurgl's assets as a skiing resort. Here, the property rights are valorized through building rights' agreements (*e.g.* ski lift station or restaurants on alpine pastures), and easements for the slopes, which create financial benefits for the farm. Certain peasants are aware of the potential value of certain plots for the tourism destination, which makes them a lucrative source of income (especially as prices are fixed by negotiation, which opens up room for speculation). Within skiing areas, there are usually few or no favourable areas for infrastructure, peasants as the landowners nowadays make use of this (historically grown) dependency. Thus in Obergurgl the meaning of 'land' is changing; once it was a resource for food production, today it is a source for financial revenues beyond the production of food. Some farms in Obergurgl can make a living on such revenues. In contrast, farms in Vent produce and sell food locally. Direct marketing strategies often depend on personal contacts with customers, *e.g.* from the Ötztal valley, and professional providers, *e.g.* local restaurants. Even though farms supply high-quality products, the available quantity is neither steady nor sufficient for the restaurants. Sourcing produce from local farms thus requires an additional effort on the part of the customers. Besides, direct marketing in the farm's own tourism structures is important for local added value. It enables farms to make use, for instance, of less sought after parts of meat in their mountain cabins.

What is the role of peasant habitus for the resilience of family farms?

Participants of this study identify themselves as peasants, *i.e.* Bauer and Bäuerin. Their farming is less directed at producing food for the market but more on producing food for their own consumption (see Shanin, 1973), the wider family, and their own or nearby hotels or mountain cabins. The farm family, consisting mainly of the peasant couple with their children as well as the parent generation, is considered an entity of social organization and brings in all manpower for the farming activities (see Shanin, 1973). Sales within the local and/or regional community are based on personal contacts, either to direct consumers or the catering sector. Social capital needs to be integrated in local supply chains, which functions well in Vent with several relationships between farmers and mountain cabins and local hotels. Thus the social network is stronger in Vent than in Obergurgl, where tourism has already turned more into professionalization and rationalization. Even if most of the farms rely on tourism activities generating the main income, and they show a second identity as a tourism service provider, they continue their

farming activities, which aligns with their strong ties to farming and the peasant community. Investments in farming are mainly sourced from tourism income, which cross-subsidizes farming infrastructure. However, in general, an extensive way of farming is performed which demands lower financial capital investments.

Conclusion

Agriculture and tourism are highly intertwined in the case study area. All previously mentioned forms of farm diversification into tourism are found and contribute to the different strategies of farm resilience. The additional income generated in tourism creates room for manoeuvre for the farms so that adaptation strategies become possible and financially affordable, also in response to any disturbance and, more importantly, as a proactive strategy to keep the farms resilient. Buffering is applied when the room for manoeuvre is limited and/or for issues of less interest for the farm. Adaptation and buffering strategies come along with an extensification of farming activities and result in a gradual loss of the traditional meaning of farming, which is the production of food.

Participants of this study understand themselves as peasants, rooted in the locality, proud of their autonomy, of their less capital-intensive way of farming, of resource-based sustainable food production and distribution practices. Their habitus is guided by peasantry values which positively influence the farm resilience and the status of the farming profession. It further hampers any transformation strategy into a tourism provider. In the case of farm closure, the releasing farmland would be taken over and continue to be farmed by other farms in the village. However, as the number of farms is limited, every peasant leaving the farming community weakens the community. Here is the habitus which makes peasants stick to farming activities even if all part-time farms investigated (farms 2-8) were not economically dependent on their farming income. However, their farming activities form their identities and continue shaping their habitus and their belonging to the farming community. Finally, it is the habitus of the farm family that enables them to activate buffering and adapting strategies.

Further, the presence of social capital within the local communities supports the symbiosis of agriculture and tourism and contributes not just to the social resilience of farms, but also to rural development in general. The networking within the community or the wider family enables direct marketing, even if it demands additional efforts on the part of customers in the catering sector (as quantities and continuity of supply are not guaranteed). However, where social capital is weakly developed, products are sold via retailers, which may not necessarily return the maximum profit for the farm. It is their social capital that enables farmers to make use of local food supply chains for their farm produce sales and to use all cuts of an animal. Here, Vent demonstrated a stronger social network to realize local food supply chains. Farm families in Obergurgl are powerful landowners. Land is not only there to be farmed, but also generates income through land leasing which enhances farm resilience.

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