

Evaluation of agri-environmental policy delivery system on regional level – case study in Bílé Karpaty

Vyhodnocování systému implementace a řízení nástrojů agroenvironmentální politiky na regionální úrovni – případová studie Bílé Karpaty

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Abstract: Regional officials who are dealing with target groups and should cope with real world limits and conflicts heavily influence implementation of agri-environmental policies. This process is not addressed enough to understand what are the concepts behind and potential difficulties when introduced the EU policies. Group of actors is operating and acting to pursue their interest on the regional level usually. Their interactions motivated by particular common interest finally could turn the policy to a failure or to a success. In order to answer some questions regarding implementation process, the case study was prepared in Bílé Karpaty dealing with farming vs. conservation conflict. The aspects of policy agreement were studied and potential changes of policy agreement as a result of the EU policies introduction in the Czech Republic was assessed. Lesson for policy design and management from the case study was expected.

Key words: policy agreement, policy actors, policy implementation, agri-environmental policy, farming vs conservation conflict

Abstrakt: Implementace politiky je významně ovlivněna úředníky, kteří pracují na regionální úrovni s cílovými skupinami obyvatel, a kteří čelí omezením a konfliktům reálného světa. Tento proces není v ČR dostatečně studován s cílem odhalit koncepty, na kterých proces stojí a pochopit potenciální obtíže spojené s implementací nástrojů politiky Evropské unie. Na regionální úrovni obvykle operuje skupina aktérů, kteří prosazují v určité oblasti politiky svůj zájem. Interakce mezi aktéry, motivované zájmem o stejnou oblast, v konečném důsledku mohou zásadně ovlivnit selhání nebo úspěch politiky. S cílem odpovědět na některé otázky spojené s implementačním procesem implementace byla uskutečněna v Bílých Karpatech případová studie, která se zabývala konfliktem mezi ochranou přírody a krajiny a zemědělstvím. Byly studovány aspekty „dohody“ o politice a její potenciální změny v závislosti na zavedení právních předpisů EU z oblasti agroenvironmentální politiky v ČR.

Klíčová slova: „dohoda“ o politice, aktéři na politické scéně, implementace politiky, agroenvironmentální politika, konflikt mezi zemědělstvím a ochranou životního prostředí

INTRODUCTION

This work is concentrated on the agri-environmental policy evaluation and is focused on its application on the regional level.

In order to defend application of policy tools and corresponding expenditure in front of taxpayers, interest groups, the government and (in the future) of the EU officials, it is necessary to build feedback system bringing the necessary arguments.

In policy evaluation, it is possible to concentrate either on the process of policy design, or on the implementation process, or on the management of policy tools and on their impact. The most frequent way of evaluation is an assessment of impact of the policies and their efficiency. Evaluations of a way by which policy tools were designed and managed in individual regions have been done less frequently in western countries and rarely in the Czech Republic.

Evaluation itself has not a long history and in Europe it is utilised from the eighties and as a feedback tool it is restricted mainly to evaluation of the effects of policies.

The main reasons for policy evaluations are: (EC 1999):

- To make sure the state policy is solving issues sufficiently and efficiently.
- To increase quality of state intervention by feedback.
- To increase the state administration responsibility.

Because there has been paid sufficient attention to ex ante, ex post and current evaluation, this study focuses on the process of policy implementation, especially the EU policies already adopted by the Czech Republic. Most of the EU studies have often questioned the reasons of frequent policy failures in the EU countries (Jordan 1998, Fernandez 1995, Lowe, Ward 1998).

Subject of this analysis is to investigate i) the ability of the system of policy actors on policy scene to manage agri-environmental policy on a daily basis and ii) the implementation process itself. The research was done in the

framework of Fifth framework programme project financed by the EU (the name of the project “Sustainable Agriculture in Central and Eastern European Countries – CEECs”).

For the case study, the protected area Bílé Karpaty was chosen. In this area both environmental and agricultural policy influence farming significantly. The work was built on an assumption that the ability of actors to integrate agri-environmental policies influenced significantly the potential success or failure of corresponding tools. The research was dominated by the question: “What risks could be expected during implementation and management of Council Regulation (EEC) 1257/1999 and so called Natura 2000 (implementation of the birds and habitats directive) in protected areas?”

THE METHODOLOGY USED

The study is characterised by qualitative research, which is searching for mechanisms and causes of observed or expected situations and events.

As a methodological framework, “policy agreement” concept was used. The concept was defined by Tatenhove et al. (2000) as “*the (substantive and organisational) stabilisation of a policy domain in terms of actors, the distribution of power an influence, policy discourse and rules of the game within a general long-term process of political modernisation*”.

Four dimensions of policy arrangements could be distinguished (Van Tatenhove et al. 2000):

1. *The actors involved or coalition between actors:*

Are organisations or institutions, which operate in a specific policy domain? The term “coalition” is used to indicate the interaction between actors. A coalition is a group of actors who more or less share the same policy goals and programmes. The latter make up the base for the involvement in the policy process.

2. *The distribution of power and influence between the actors:*

The power is determined by the dependency relations and the distribution of resources among the actors. Resources can be financial means, knowledge, access to the media, etc. The distribution indicates for instance the influence of the actors in the various stages of the policy process.

3. *The prevailing policy discourses:*

To give meaning to and solve environmental problems, actors use so-called policy discourses. Van Tatenhove et al. (2000) defines discourse as a specific assemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities.

4. *The prevailing rules of the game:*

Rules of the game determine how policies and politics are played and which norms are legitimate. A distinction is often made between formal and informal rules. Formal rules are rules actors have agreed upon, while informal rules reflect the dominant political culture.

In order to identify power distribution among actors, the network analysis (Sciaryny 1996) was used.

Data were collected during semi-structured interviews with the most important actors in the region. The core question was: “What changes do you expect amongst actors, policy distribution, policy discourse and rules of the game when introducing Regulation 1257 and Natura 2000 in your protected area”?

RESULTS

Exposition

Bílé Karpaty is well known by large areas of flowers, rich meadows with dozens of orchids and other rare plant species. Existence of meadows is dependent to high degree on traditional and especially extensive land use. At the beginning of the 1990s, large land abandonment occurred and the subject of protection was endangered seriously. The approach to nature protection adopted by different policy actors in the region changed significantly during the last ten years. The biggest shift of policies and strategies was performed by the Landscape Protection Area Administration (PLAA), which reduced the use of power in pursuing the protection interests, and which is now more participative to all actors in the region (and has got more trust from them). Majority of agricultural land is cultivated now, but economical performance of grassland farming is indicating that the threat of land abandonment is still there. The level of cultivation is result of supporting policies of MoA and MoE too. In reactions to the land abandonment trend, various policy tools were introduced, especially, contracts between farmers and PLAA and the support to farming in PLA by the Ministry of Agriculture). The efficiency of support was questioned by PLAA regarding potential positive impacts to the subject of protection. Agri-environmental pilot project as a regional specific measure was designed in the SAPARD¹ framework and allowed to prepare more targeted policy tool. PLAA, farmers and NGOs prepared management prescriptions jointly and this process allowed agreeing on solutions of majority of farming vs. conservation issues.

Results of research

Actors:

Following actors operate in the region (a selection of the most important): the Ministry of Agriculture – SAPARD

¹ SAPARD is the pre-accession EU policy tool aiming at preparation of countries for structural funds use. Countries in accession are supposed to get experiences in policy design and implementation. Agri-environmental pilot areas are part of the SAPARD proposal in the Czech Republic.

Agency (three regional offices), PLAA Bílé Karpaty, Information Centre of Moravské Kopenice (NGO – next ICMK) and farmers.

Power distribution

Table 1. Power distribution (current)

Actor	Votes
SAPARD Agency (Ministry of Agriculture)	9
PLAA	8
ICMK (NGO)	5
Farmers	4

Source: Pražan 2001a

Answers of actors represent a rich source of evidence of reasons for communication among actors. Table 1 shows clearly the importance of both state administrations. Exceptional value has NGO (ICMK) without which it could be much more difficult to manage agri-environmental policies in the region (as frequently mentioned by other respondents). All actors agreed that this organisation acted as a mediator building trust amongst farmers and between farmers and the regional office of the Ministry of Agriculture (next MoA) and PLAA. In addition, ICMK was regarded as the most important source of information and extension.

Expected changes among actors in the region

- a) Actors believed there would be substantial growth of demand for services provided currently by NGO by the time of the EU accession. In turn, it means there is a space for additional actor/s, however, no new actor of this kind has appeared in the region yet.
- b) Implementation of pilot agri-environmental measure in the SAPARD framework will cause significant increase power of the Agricultural Agency over the farmers and at the same time decrease of power of PLAA. It was indicated this change of influence could be unacceptable to PLAA, because administrators will lose chance to meet farmers and to persuade them to nature protection (loss of motivation for both sides to meet). The questioned administrator was surprised when she realised potential difficulties coming from the SAPARD implementation. Such finding was paradoxical because measures in the SAPARD framework were designed mainly by PLAA representatives (with farmers and NGO participation). The proposal promised to solve majority of the problems of farming vs. conservation conflict in the area. Following proposal occurred during the interview: Involvement of PLAA representative to compliance check process and application approval was identified as a solution to the process of policies imple-

mentation which could assure to keep power distribution in balance. On the other hand implementation of Natura 2000 will give more power to PLAA. Farmers believe that implementation of Natura 2000 is a purely restrictive measure. It means farmers will lose partly their property rights and influence. There is a clear conclusion: It is not enough to design measures with the main stakeholders but it is necessary to consult implementation with them too.

- c) Respondents were able to identify first of all sectoral approach to policies implementation from policy discourse. Everybody was sure the Natura 2000 and measures in framework of Regulation 1257/99 implementation will impose high pressure to overcome sectoral approach. One of the respondents did not believe such pressure would influence this factor. The whole investigation and comments of respondents showed that insufficient coordination of policies reduces policy efficiency, create problems in nature protection, undermining trust to state policies and cause unnecessary costs in administration.
- d) In case of rules of the game: there is not any change expected in case of Regulation 1257/99 implementation, in contrary significant change in rules of the game is expected in Natura 2000 implementation. One of the requirements of the Natura 2000 implementation is to involve policy takers into the process. Survey showed such requirement does not represent big need of formal rules (it is already present in current legislation) but in case of informal rules (observation of the rules, attitudes to other actors and ways of negotiation), which are part of the political culture in Czech Republic. Representatives of PLAA suppose implementation of such principles will cause lot of difficulties.

DISCUSSION

Policies could fail because of different reasons and this article presents part of research results focused to the implementation and management process of agri-environmental policies on regional level. Results showed it is important to know dynamics of actor's relationship and to adapt the implementation process according. Respondents were able to identify a relatively simple and efficient solution even during the interviews, which means solutions are not necessarily difficult to find and implement. These issues were not so far intentionally addressed and questioned. Representative of the MoE stated if the policy makers do not put relevant and targeted questions in this area of policy implementation (on regional and national level too) it is sure integration of agri-environmental policies will be poor and risk of policy failures will be high.

Implementation of the EU legislation will be associated by change of not only formal framework of legal and natural person behaviour but it will be demanding change of the informal rules (in policy culture on both national

and regional level). Similar pressure will be imposed to sectoral approach in agri-environmental policy implementation and management with intentional integration of the policies of the MoE and the MoA on regional and national level. Current practice shows that it is easier to change policies (as measures) than factors of policy implementation in question and this is why more attention should be paid to them. The case study clearly described that even quite well designed measures could easily fail if implemented without sufficient involvement of relevant policy network into implementation process.

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