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Lukas Zagata, Michal Lošťák**, Nigel Swain****

Family Farm Succession of the First Post-Socialist Generation in the Czech Republic****

Abstract

The main goal of the paper is to provide insights into the family succession processes in terms of the first inter-generational renewal that has been re-started in the Czech agricultural sector. We want to understand how major transformation processes (i.e., collectivisation, restitution, the post-socialist economic transformation and EU membership) constituted social structures that framed inter-generational change on Czech farms. Such a framework includes the "farm succession gap" that has resulted from the long-term societal changes and that is still reflected in the ongoing succession processes.

Keywords: agriculture; succession gap; qualitative study; endogenous factors; motivation

* *Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Faculty of Economics and Management, Department of Humanities*

** *Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Faculty of Economics and Management, Department of Humanities*

*** *University of Liverpool, School of Histories Languages and Cultures, Department of History*

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Introduction

Farm succession and the problem of aging in agriculture have become new research challenges, as documented in recent policy papers (EC 2012; EC 2013) and academic studies (Zagata and Sutherland 2015; Chiswell and Lobley 2016; Duesberg et al. 2017). This situation creates a need for a detailed understanding of how older farmers are retiring from agriculture and how young farmers are taking their place.

A critical examination of ongoing discussions of the aging population of farmers suggests that this problem is not ubiquitous throughout the EU (Zagata and Sutherland 2015: 49). We must consider specific historical, social and economic aspects to understand the complexity of how farmers secure the continuity of their business. This study uses empirical findings obtained in the Czech Republic to represent the peculiar case of a post-socialist country where, importantly, the traditional patterns of intra-family farm succession that were suppressed during the era of Soviet influence (1948–1989) have been renewed by the current generation of farmers.

The Czech Republic is one of the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe in which family farming was marginalised during the socialist period. In the 1950s, the agricultural sector was collectivised, and family farming almost ceased to exist. At the end of the socialist period (late 1980s), family farms operated only 0.4% of the overall agricultural land (Hudečková and Lošťák 1995b). The collapse of the Soviet system in 1989 provided the opportunity for the renewal of family farming. Although Czech agriculture is currently firmly embedded in the economic and administrative structures of the EU, family farmers lack direct experience with succession processes. This experience gap is a legacy of the collectivised agriculture that dominated the country for four decades. Under such circumstances, the current generation of family farmers received their farms *not as part of the succession process* but through *the transformation of the socialist cooperatives, the privatization of state holdings, and within the restitution processes in agriculture.*

The objective of this paper is twofold: (1) to provide empirical insights into the family succession processes in terms of the first inter-generational renewal that has been re-started in the Czech Republic and (2) to explain how this historical experience currently affects the practices of farmers, who nowadays pass their farms to their successors. We want to use these

findings to enrich the ongoing debate on farm succession with the new perspective on the interplay between exogenous (external) factors and the family, which serves as the locus for the farm succession.

Theoretical framework of farm succession processes

Family farms represent 97% of all farms in Europe (EP 2014). These holdings are passed from one generation to another within a family, because the agricultural sector is characterised by a strong professional heredity that does not exist in any other business (de Haan 1994; Fischer and Burton 2014). Academic research investigating generational renewal in agriculture notes a number of barriers to new entrants and successors in agriculture, such as access to land, the requirement for large capital investment, low rates of return, access to pensions and housing for retiring farmers, and education and training for new entrants (Dumas et al. 2005; Zagata and Sutherland 2015). Most studies on farm succession are interested in the conditions for *young farmers* (Bika 2007; Mann 2007; Calus et al. 2008; Chiswell 2016). In contrast, studies focusing on the situation and behaviour of *older farmers* are less frequent (Lobley et al. 2010; Brandth and Overrein 2013; Riley 2014). The available literature, however, clearly demonstrates that the process of inter-generational turnover in agriculture *entails both groups of farmers at the same time.* Therefore, the process is related not only to the issue of *entry* but also to the issue of *exit from agriculture*.

As such, farm succession is shaped by various factors that have been documented in detail by numerous empirical studies (Hutson 1987; Keating and Munro 1989; Potter and Lobley 1992; Taylor et al. 1998). This study has been theoretically inspired by the holistic approach proposed by Fischer and Burton (2014). The advantage of this approach is the ability to explain how the development of the family farm affects the construction of the farmer's identity and his/her relation to the family farm and agriculture. Consistent with social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1967), the farmers-farm relationship evolves through interaction between the farm and its successor: the situation in the family business (which is a subject of the succession) forms the actor's identity, and the subjective approach of the actor (who takes over the farm) creates the present and future reality of the family farm.

Fischer and Burton (2014) emphasise that the actual succession entails three mutually dependent processes. First, an initial baseline of the social identity is formed: children gain experience with farm work, which eventually leads them to perceive themselves as future successors who will take over the farm. Second, successors gradually climb the "farm ladder": family members engage in different types of farm work, starting with simple tasks and moving up to the top of the "ladder", when they take over the managerial role. Third, simultaneously with the development of such social relations, the farm undergoes major changes: a farm that will be transferred through a family succession must receive an important impetus for future development. It is possible to develop a long-term business plan and make investments that increase the productivity of the farm. The successful takeover of a farm rests on these three processes, which tie together the life-cycles of the family and the farm and are of an endogenous nature. However, an outcome of the farm succession is also formed by exogenous circumstances that occur on a macro-level of society, including the way in which members of society perceive farming and its structure. The holistic conceptual framework for the farm succession thus includes endogenous factors (related to the development trajectory of the farm and social relations among the family members) as well as exogenous factors (related to the changes in institutional framework and structural adjustment or societal demands).

Farm succession patterns in Europe significantly changed in the second half of the twentieth century as an outcome of modernisation in agriculture. The changes were driven by the increasing individualisation "disembedding and, second, re-embedding of industrial society ways of live by new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves" (Beck and Lash 1994: 13). The increasing individualisation impacted the attitudes of the young generation towards preferred ways of life, including the responsibility to take over a family farm. It is empirically documented that the older generation of farmers was much more closely tied to family and farm commitments than the current generation (Villa, 1999; Brandth and Overrein 2013). As a trade-off for requirements and strict guidelines, members of the young generation have more freedom and a wider range of choices and opportunities to orient their life course. Detailed analysis of the impacts of individualisation can be found in the study by Chiswell (2016), who showed that the younger

generation in farming families feels much less harnessed by collective social structures and traditions. However, this finding does not imply that the interest of young people in family farms is decreasing. Instead, it means that the life trajectory of individuals is becoming less straightforward and predictable with respect to major societal changes and the transformation of family farms.

The effects of exogenous factors have been documented in several studies. Gasson and Erington (1993) showed how events and economic processes occurring in the "background" are reflected in family farm cycles. A similar argument appears in the work of Potter and Lobley (1996: 303), who concluded "not that succession occurs in a policy vacuum", since the business plans of farmers are always carried out in interaction with existing policy measures. This thesis has been recently elaborated in numerous studies that are providing more evidence of how political instruments impact farmers' decisions and the succession process (Mann 2007; Sottomayor et al. 2011) with a special focus on the policy schemes that support young farmers and the retirement of the older generation (Bika 2007; EP 2014; Zagata and Sutherland 2015).

Despite the importance of the "wider circles" (Fischer and Burton 2014) in succession processes, these factors have not been treated in the studies as a key driving force of succession. In our analysis, external, exogenous factors are given the primary position. We want to understand how major transformation processes (i.e., collectivisation, restitution, the post-socialist economic transformation and EU membership) constituted social structures that framed inter-generational change on Czech farms. Such a framework includes the "farm succession gap" that has resulted from the long-term societal changes and that – as we will explain later – is still reflected in the ongoing farm succession processes. Such a perspective is very different from those of the vast majority of studies that examine the reproduction of family businesses and succession patterns that have been repeated for generations. The inter-generational transfer of farms in the Czech Republic is not embedded in traditional practices and continuously evolving patterns of succession, as is a priori assumed in most theoretical accounts of farm succession in Europe. This also holds for other CEE countries that underwent collectivisation in agriculture. However, the historical trajectory of the Czech agriculture represents a somewhat unique case. The Hungarian agriculture, for instance, kept dual structure of large

estates operating alongside small farms even under central planning (Meurs 2001), which enabled faster decollectivisation of the agricultural sector, as well as renewal of the private farming within the "embourgeoisement process" (Szelényi 1995).

In our study, we hypothesise that the eroded tradition of family farming created a peculiar context for the farm-succession process. The aim of the study is to explore how the first post-socialist generation of farmers managed to revive the process of generational transfer in interaction with their successors with respect to the diminished ascriptive role that secured the continuity of family farming.

The first post-collectivist generation of farmers

Before 1948, when the Communist Party took power, farm succession in the Czech Republic followed traditional patterns that existed in Western Europe. Detailed descriptions exist in sociological studies of that time. I. A. Bláha (1925) noted that the continuity of farming is supported by a specific attribute of farmers which he called *zemitost* because *země* means land, and the whole life of a farmer relates to land. Such an attribute motivates them with an imperative need to find a successor. A similar explanation provided Karel Galla (1939), who recognised the generational turnover on farms as a requirement for the stable social structure of a village. The issue of farm succession ceased to exist – in academic discourse as well as in practice – after the collectivisation in agriculture, when family farmers were forced to hand over their property to the collectivised farms which were run by a professional (and politically reliable) management board.

The revitalisation of private ownership after 1989, when the Communist regime collapsed, opened the door to the question of the renewal of family farms. Some of the new holdings continued the legacy of the large-scale industrialised farming that was practised in the socialist period (Swain 2007; Swain 2014; Maurell 1998). However, a new category of family farmers simultaneously emerged, who claimed the restitution of family assets that had been operated by collective farms under Communist rule.

To comprehend their situation, it is useful to outline the process of agricultural restitution, which started after 1991 and resulted in the gradual transfer of property back to its original owners. The number of private sole

holders increased by more than seven times (starting from approximately 3,000) between 1989 and 1995 (Hurtíková 1996). The original owners received their restituted land, farm buildings, dwellings and other assets and in certain cases monetary compensation for livestock, machines and other property that had been confiscated during collectivisation. The process of restitution enabled the farmers to acquire the economic means for family farming.

The vast majority of the new family farmers operated using land and assets that they received as restitution the property that had previously been collectivised (Hudečková and Lošťák 1995b). Some still remembered their family farms that had existed before 1948, when they were children, and they strove to recover the farms, out of respect for their forebears.

The situation of these newly formed groups of family holders has been described in detail in many studies that were conducted during the 1990s (Majerová 1991; Majerová 1993; Hudečková 1992; Lošťák, Hudečková and Rikoon 1999). Concerning succession patterns, they often showed three basic scenarios. Many farmers who received their restituted property were already at retirement age (or close to it); therefore, the restitution process occurred together with the search for a successor. Some were unable to find a successor, especially when their children pursued careers outside agriculture and their family farm had to stop due to – what we call – "abandoned succession". Another group of farmers started farming together with their children or grandchildren, and hence their farm underwent an "incomplete succession". Finally, the third group comprised restituents whose parents were too old to take over the farm or had already passed away. In 1989, this group of farmers was approximately middle-aged or younger, and most had experience working in collectivised agriculture. It is this group (the first generation of the post-socialist farmers) that is currently facing the question of succession. Nationwide, this group includes some entrepreneurs with no previous professional or family relation to agriculture. However, we limited our study to holders who had their origins in agriculture and who obtained restitution of the family property that had been collectivised.

The new family farmers restored their position in the agricultural sector very slowly and faced many difficulties, primarily economic and institutional obstacles as well as the socio-cultural inertia of the rural areas (often expressed in nostalgia for socialist agriculture or questioning of the

function of the rural), which together prevented a faster transition (Swain 1999; Lošťák 2004; Pospěch 2014).

What the generation of farmers who now face the question of succession lacks is the experience of having lived on a family farm across generations. Albeit many owners of the collectivised property were members of cooperative farms or worked on state-owned farms, the families lost control over the reproduction of the farms and upbringing of their successors. Succession theory in agriculture, as well as later theoretical concepts reviewed above, assumes that the relationship to the farm is founded at an early stage of socialisation and formed throughout a person's entire life. These theories take for granted that the family farm exists per se and that the life and work of the family are directly linked to it. However, socialist collectivisation disabled a whole generation of farmers to see the "passing of land from fathers to sons" and in this way breached the very basic social script, which is a nexus of farm continuity (Silvasti 2003; Riley 2014: 239). By disrupting this script, the farm succession process entered a peculiar development trajectory that we will analyse in detail.

Methods used

Data for the study were collected from November 2015 to July 2016 using semi- standardised interviews and the snowball sampling procedure. Each interview was based on standardised guidelines. The sampled farm was usually the venue of the interview.

With respect to the focus of the study – understanding how the farms are passed from one generation to another in the Czech situation – we decided to use the joint interview approach described by Riley (2014). Practical circumstances led us to apply this approach in two different ways. On certain farms, we simultaneously interviewed members of both generations, who created a single co-narrative. In other cases, we conducted the interviews separately. In these cases, the data from the interviews were "merged" during the analysis; therefore, we viewed these intra-family relations as a whole. The combination of the two approaches had a positive impact on our research. The first approach enabled us to observe how shared views and social relations are constructed in mutual interaction between generations. The second approach helped us record information

that may not have been presented during direct interaction between the members of a family. The interpretation focused mainly on the content of the interviews (rather than the form and dynamics); thus, we used the gathered data equally, regardless of the form of the interview. A summary of the conducted interviews is presented in Table 1. Our sample included farms located in the Pilsen Region, the third-largest region (of 14) in the Czech Republic, with a below-average density of population; with 30% of the inhabitants living in rural municipalities; with fewer than 2 thousand inhabitants; and with 7.5% of all Czech business entities in agriculture, forestry and fishery (CZSO 2016).

Table 1. List of the conducted interviews

FARM NAME	INTERVIEW TYPE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	PERSONS INTERVIEWED	
			1st Generation	2nd Generation
Farm H	Joint	3	Father	Son(H) and his wife
Farm N	Single	2	Father	Son(H)
Farm P	Single	2	Father	Son(H)
Farm K	Single	2	Father(H)	Son
Farm G	Joint	2	Father(H)	Son
Farm C	Single	1	Father(H)	1)
Farm V	Joint	3	Father and mother(H)	Daughter
Farm M	Single	1	2)	Son(H)
Farm L	Joint	2	Father and mother(H)	Son
Farm B	Joint	2	Father and mother(H)	Son

(H) The symbol denotes the formal holder of the farm among the interviewed persons on the farm.

[1] Children of the farmer have not been engaged in the work on the farm or in the succession process.

[2] Father of the farmer died in 2001.

All the studied farms are categorised as the farms of sole proprietors based on the official definition used in farm surveys (Eurostat 2015a). They are represented by farms that specialise in plant production and also farms with

combined production. The average farm size in the Czech Republic is 133 hectares (Eurostat 2015b), and the sampled farms illustrated the situation of small and medium-sized farms in the Czech Republic. Further details of the investigated farms are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic description of the farms

FARM NAME[1]	STAGE OF SUCCESSION	FARM SIZE	FARM TYPE	RDP MEASURES[2]
Farm H	Completed		Arable, dairy, cattle	No
Farm N	Completed		Arable	Yes
Farm P	Completed	130 ha	Arable	Yes
Farm K	Ongoing	90 ha	Arable	No
Farm G	Ongoing	240 ha	Arable, cattle, horses	No
Farm C	Ongoing		Arable	No
Farm V	Ongoing	40 ha	Arable, cattle, horses	No
Farm M	Completed		Arable, cattle, horses	No
Farm L	Ongoing	100 ha	Arable, dairy, cattle	Yes
Farm B	Ongoing	752 ha	Arable, cattle, sheep	No

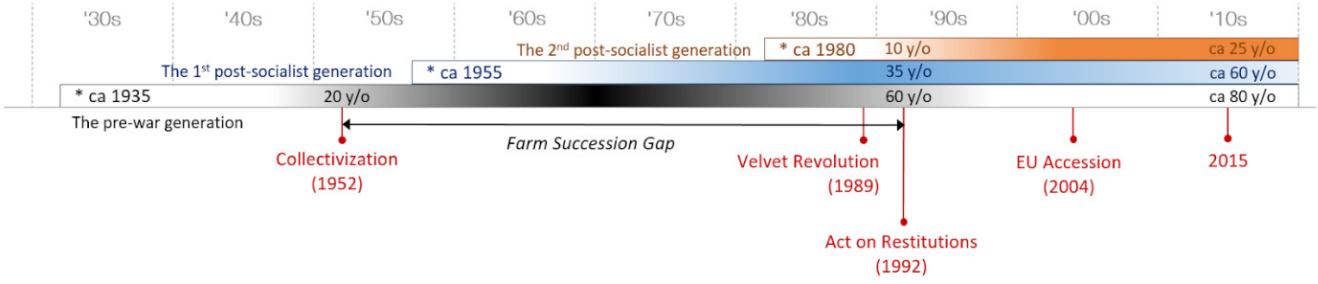
[1] To maintain the anonymity of the farmers, the names of the localities have been changed.

[2] Implementation of Measure 112 (Setting up of young farmers) and Measure 113 (Early retirement of farmers and farm workers).

Reconstructing the script of family farming

As a legacy of collectivisation, the Czech countryside was depleted of many of its social and cultural rural features because of the disrupted peasant tradition (Hudečková 2004; Hudečková 1995: 453). The first generation of post-socialist farmers (which is the focus of our study) engaged in the renovation of this tradition to a great extent. The timeline and historical events relevant to this generation are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Timeline depicting three generations of farmers in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic (1930s–2010s)



Note: *The timeline chronicles three generations of farmers and the relevant historical events in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. Each generation is represented by the theoretical representation of an individual born in the 1930s (the pre-war generation), the 1950s (the first post-socialist generation) and the 1980s (the second post-socialist generation).*

The entrance into agriculture of the first post-socialist farmers was unique in many aspects. It was based not on the handover of property from one generation to another but on the transfer of property that had been collectivised or confiscated by the state, mostly in the 1950s. The restitution processes highlighted historical relations and symbolically linked family members across generations. This process has also become a constitutive element for the renewal of the script of family farming. Their reasons for starting a new business in agriculture were highly diverse and strongly affected by each family's biography, intra-family relationships and attitudes towards economic transformation. One of the dimensions of difference that emerged strongly from the interviews was between families with *a strong peasant tradition* [Farms H, M, L, B] and those in which this *tradition had weakened* or completely diminished [Farms N, P, K, G, C, V]

In the case of the families with a strong peasant tradition, the continuity of farming is based on an innate commitment to maintaining the tradition, a commitment so strong that it remained in peasant families over the four decades of the socialist era, during which they did not have a right to utilise their property as a family. Restitution provided the opportunity of restoring this family tradition. The interviews with these farmers showed that the renewal of the tradition was understood not as *an entrance into farming* but as *a return*. Such a view was emphasised by the fact that the restitutions mostly involved the generation which had directly experienced life on a family farm before collectivisation. This experience became the main source for restoring the continuity script as well as for building the commitment to re-enter farming.

Another important aspect in the decision of the farmers was the fact that members of the peasant families had mostly continued to work in agriculture before 1989, mostly on the local collective farm that operated their collectivised property. The restitution process enabled them to become independent again and to start farming as family farmers. In the interviews, the farmers highlighted that they were in fact the first registered family farmers (in their administrative district), which proves their indisputable effort to return to family farming. The families with a very strong peasant tradition manifested a continued integral identity as farmers, despite external circumstances and the duration of the period during which they did not have their own farms. One example is a family which lost its land twice over half a century (first because of the Nazi occupation and then

because of collectivisation in the 1950s) but retained their family tradition of farming. From their perspective, the restitutions returned farming to a "normal situation" that allows the succession of the property from one generation to another. As the member of the older generation said:

> [Farm H]: *Finally, we have farmland that can be inherited.*

Accentuating landownership is one of the most defining features of this first group. This finding matches certain concepts in the history of rural sociology, namely, the embeddedness in land. The peasant tradition is often framed by a specific sense of land or even an *instinct* for landownership that continues to exist despite radical historical changes (as was described by J.M. Gillete and I.A. Bláha).

Unlike the first group of farmers, the *families with a weak peasant tradition* considered the restitution process not as the occasion to meet traditional commitments but as a professional opportunity. This group had ties to agriculture through their families, and many of its members had worked in agriculture before 1989. They were most likely employed in agricultural cooperatives or state-owned agricultural holdings as agricultural specialists with at least a secondary level of education. In their case, the restituted property was a necessary but not sufficient requirement for entering agriculture as private holders. They actually started their own business when the local socialist collective farm (that was employing them) was about to break up. Under these circumstances, they considered that they were forced to become independent, as the following section of an interview documents:

> [Farm S]: *I was the head of mechanization, and the JZD* [the socialist agricultural cooperative – authors' note] *was falling apart. Either I had to become director and fire from the co-op half of the people living in the village or go private, which seemed easier.*

Farmers from the second group (the families with a weak tradition) did not feel the commitment to continue the farming tradition. They considered their decision an outcome of a rational choice, which they had made in response to an existing situation, or an opportunity, which emerged as a positive alternative to other possibilities at the time of the bifurcation

of the development of farming. Their farms were much more specialised, mostly in crop production. Unlike the peasant families, who typically have farms that combine crop production and livestock and generally tend to higher diversification. Regarding the situation of the commodity markets in the Czech Republic, the first approach appeared to be a less risky business strategy. The traditional peasant families which gave priority to the renewal of the family farm had to accept a higher economic risk.

Although there are obvious contrasts between them, the two groups also have much in common. Representatives of both groups established their farms on a family basis and cooperated across family generations. At the beginning, the work was typically shared between the generation of farmers who received the farm as restitution and the older generation, who were experienced in pre- collectivised farming. Another common feature was the size of the farms: the restituted land received by the first generation of farmers matched the size of farms before collectivisation. During the interviews, the farmers noted a range of 8–20 hectares of land that they restituted. Starting farming was difficult for both groups because the economic transformation of the collectivised farms was generally viewed as a "betrayal" of those who were working on the cooperative or state farms. Restitution of the property in rural communities was often associated with negative consequences and envy (Swain 2013: 106–107). Local people, nostalgic for the previous political regime, often shared the idea that the new restituents were "taking away their jobs" [Farm M]. The agricultural sector generally faced a crisis associated with the transition from the centrally planned economy to market capitalism. Liberal politicians disregarded agriculture because they considered it a pet project of the socialist era. Such a negative image impacted the process of structural change and favourable institutionalisation for the new family farms (Bezemer 2002a).

We did not study how the work of farmers was performed 25 years ago in detail. However, based on the interviews, we argue that this period generated a formative experience that was firmly integrated in the family biography and history of the farms. The farmers' practices generated a context in which their children (members of the new generation) were socialised and created social identities associated with the family farm. Their children, who were growing up during this period, are currently engaged in the farm succession processes as members of the second generation (see above Figure 1).

Seeking a successor

[Farm G]: *Do you know how one becomes a farmer? He must be born on a farm and never have done anything else except farming.*

Constructing the identity of a farmer is a key point in agricultural succession. Fischer and Burton accentuate an early period of socialisation during which a bond between the farm and a potential successor is created. Such a bond drives the co-construction of the farm and the successor/farmer that appears to be a "natural' process" (Fischer and Burton 2014: 433). An implicit requirement is that the socialisation occurs on the farm, where children live and grow up.

The first generation of post-socialist farmers was not able to establish such a relationship with the family farm because they had not grown up there. Their relationship to the family property and farming was established through the storytelling of the previous generation, which had experienced living on the family farm. In their case, socialisation did not draw on the direct experience of "living on the farm" but instead needed the substitute of "storytelling about the family farm". The note presented above is valid in many aspects: the farmer's identity is based on socialisation that equips successors with practical skills and concurrently provides initialisation from those who are doing agriculture. Based on our interviews, we argue that the "identity of a farmer" can be created not only through birth and living on the farm but also through a symbolic relationship and shared personal history. Creating such identity, which substitutes for the actual experience of living on a farm, was more successful within families with a strong peasant tradition.

The socialisation process of the second generation of farmers was specifically framed, especially in the early 1990s, when the peasant families put effort into restoring their family businesses. The interviews suggest that the farms were rapidly developing (farmed land was increasing in size, machinery was being modernised, farm economy was being structurally adjusted). Concurrently, the farms were taking high economic risks due to the turbulence emerging from the economic transformation and minimal support from the state. The farmers in their interviews noted how difficult this period was. Such circumstances have become an important factor that shaped the relationship of the potential successors (belonging to

the second generation) to the family farm. The ongoing process of farm succession partly reflects this historical development in a sense that farms that struggled economically in the 1990s were less likely to support their children to continue farming.

The renewed family farms relied on cooperation among family members from the beginning of their operation. The model of inter-generational patrilineal cooperation was the most typical and included members of the oldest generation, if they were still living on the farm and capable of a manual work, as was documented in several interviews [Farms M, V, P]. Children from the youngest generation also engaged in the work, depending on their age. Families speaking about farms on which young boys had grown up described their interest as focused on the machinery used on the farms. Families with daughters mentioned the girls' interest in farm animals, most often horses. Overall, such experiences with farming contributed to the natural identity of a farmer, as was described in other studies describing socialisation of farmers' children:

> [Farm H]: [How did your son get into agriculture? – authors]. *He grew up here. He has been driving a combine harvester since he was 12.*

The multi-generational farm families with a strong peasant tradition believed that boys (rather than girls) should be the ones to take over the farm. Girls were recognised as successors if *they bring someone* [a man – authors' note], *as it used to be* [Farm H] because farming requires physical strength, stamina and skill that women lack. This idea was less frequent on farms with a weak peasant tradition because the older generation of farmers was less conservative. Nevertheless, it was clear that most farmers sought a male successor based on the traditional understanding of men's and women's roles on the farm, as illustrated in the descriptions of the engagement of children with farm work.

The importance of the gender aspects is particularly obvious in the cases of farms lacking a male successor. Such a situation confirms the findings from other studies that noted the commonly held assumption that daughters were not capable of taking over the family farm (Mann, 2007: 442). In our research, in a case in which the farmer – the father of two daughters, who was unable to find a successor – was thinking aloud about the uncertain continuity of the farm:

[Farm S]: *If I had a boy, I might have convinced him.*

The interviews also highlighted how members of the younger generation were acquiring experience with farming in a process reflecting the ladder model (for details, see Keating and Little, 1994). School education played quite an important role in this process. The choice of a school has become a key turning point in the long-term upbringing of a successor. Peasant families often orient their children towards education in agricultural secondary schools [Farms H, M, L, B], while the non-peasant families were less strict in controlling the educational career of their children. Although we were unable to collect evidence regarding who made the decision (children or parents), it is obvious that such a choice of school had an important impact on the successful socialisation of the successor, who was better prepared to take over the farm. This finding is also supported by the negative cases. Those children who did not study in agricultural schools only returned to family farms on rare occasions. Concurrently, peasant families applied more control over the choice of schools to control the future career of their children. Some of the current successors commented on their situation:

[Farm V]: *Indeed, there was not much choice for us.*
[Farm H]: *I was thinking about a different school, but it was not allowed for me.*

Parents from the first generation also tried to deflect children from university study, which was associated with living in a city and therefore with a high risk of leaving the farm, as was documented in one of the interviews:

[Farm M]: *When I left for the uni, my father was strictly against it. He was concerned that I would not come back on the farm, like my older brothers.*

Members of the older generation often explicitly mentioned that an interest in farming cannot be forced, since the farm is "a natural organism and the relationship must be innate" [Farm G], inherently created by a successor. However, the establishment of such a relationship is potentially threatened by the individualisation process, which neglects commitments based on traditions and gives more freedom to people over their life course, and

increases the chance of pursuing a career outside the farm. Our analysis confirmed that individualisation is more prevalent amongst the group of families with weak peasant tradition.

Older farmers translated the dilemma of the *collective* (i.e., family) *commitment* and *individual freedom* into the children's specific choice between *farming* and an *urban career.* Analysis of the interviews suggests that such a decision is not trivial and that potential successors from the second generation indeed thoroughly evaluate their pathways. Overall, a career as a farmer was adopted by those who (1) accepted a rural way of life, (2) found farming personally satisfactory and (3) trusted the economic background of their family farm. These conditions were more likely to be met in our study by the farms with a strong peasant tradition [Farm H, Farm M, Farm L]. They engaged children in the farm work more intensively and retained greater control over their professional careers.

The process of individualisation does not always represent a threat to farm succession. Farms with a weak peasant tradition, where children received more individual freedom to obtain an education and find a job outside agriculture, also showed situations in which the children decided to leave their job in a city and returned in middle age to the farm to take it over [Farm K]. It seems clear that such a decision depends on the currently growing economic potential of family farms and a new interest in agriculture that has become apparent since the Czech Republic joined the EU. It is a second example of a 'rational' decision to enter farming, like the earlier one of the fathers' generation in 1992, driven by the new economic circumstances of EU membership and CAP subsidies makes agriculture a rational choice for some.

Institutional support of farm succession

The administrative tools addressing inter-generational turnover are among the important exogenous factors impacting farm succession. The timeline in our case study shows that the Czech Republic started implementing these measures after becoming an EU member in 2004. Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 included the measure "Setting up of young farmers" coupled with the measure "Early retirement from farming". The annual report on implementation (MZe 2016) shows the

results of the implementation of these measures. The young farmer measure supported 1364 projects, and approximately half of them (642 projects) were supplemented with the early retirement measure.

However, the requirements influencing the approval of such support included one significant contradiction. On the one hand, the administration attempted to attract new entrants to agriculture (farmers had to be registered as new entrepreneurs), but on the other hand, the volume of the financial support (€40 thousand) was not adequate to overcome the major barrier for entry, i.e., the high investment costs for land acquisition and the necessary machinery. This contradiction existed, importantly, when the measure supporting young farmers was not applied within an intra-family succession of an already existing farm.

In our study, we documented two cases [Farm N, Farm P] of farmers who took the opportunity and used the support efficiently. The other farms demonstrated gradual succession, and members of the younger generation started their own parallel business, which disqualified them from using this measure [Farm H, Farm G, Farm M]. For certain farmers, the support was not motivational enough [Farm V], or they found the administration of the measure burdensome [Farm E]. Both farms that successfully applied the measure are within the group of those with a weak peasant tradition.

For the first farm [Farm N], the subsidy has become a useful impetus for completing the family farm succession. The process was facilitated by the effective division of labour between the father (a highly qualified expert in crop production) and his son (who specialised in machinery). The farm succession was formally completed with the Rural Development Programme project utilising the measures for young farmers and early retirement. The financial support has been invested in new technology for the post-harvest processing of grain.

The situation of the second farm [Farm P] contrasts with the overall positive story. In 2010, the son submitted a project within the young farmer scheme, and the father applied for the early retirement scheme. However, the farm was not in fact handed over, and the succession was implemented only formally. The subsidy was used for standard modernisation of the farm without a meaningful change in the management and ownership of the farm. The project was successful when viewed from an administrative perspective. However, it did not in fact result in the expected outcomes. The farmer told us that he was not sure whether his son would ever take

over the farm, but he hoped for it [Farm P]. The major motive in this case was the financial subsidy, which was supposed to be discontinued in the next programming period. Interviews with other farmers [e.g., Farm V] indicate that this case was not an exception and clearly document major discrepancies between the "rules of the game" and the intentions of the policy makers, as described by the school of new institutional economics (North 1990).

The examples described here erode the rationale of the measures intended to encourage young farmers and new entrants. Our empirical findings support the argument that the motivational effect of these measures is indeed negligible (Matthews 2013); farm succession within the family would have been executed even without this kind of support. Albeit the measure is intended to support new entrants, establishing a brand-new farm seems to be impossible. Providing a financial subsidy does not help overcome the main barrier for entering the sector – the lack of finances. In reality, the measure supports young farmers within the intra-family succession and in some cases encourages rent-seeking behaviour.

In the contemporary programming period (2014–2020), the measures have been changed. The Czech Rural Development Programme terminated the early retirement scheme, modified the conditions for the young farmer scheme and increased the overall support to 45 thousand euros. However, the applicants must document that at the time when they submit the project application, they already have revenue from farming that is based on the minimal value of standard production. The reason for this modification is to ensure that the business plans submitted by farmers will generate sufficient revenue. Concurrently, this change accentuated the contradiction of supporting young farmers without a measure supporting early retirement. Support for "young farmers" is designed to be closed to potential "new entrants" to agriculture.

The Czech context indicates another important factor that significantly influences the results of administrative support. Until 2014, the legal act that qualified handover of the farm as a formal sale was in force. The transfer of the family business resulted in a high tax obligation for the older generation. It was estimated that handing over an average-sized farm of 150 ha to children required a revenue tax of 75 thousand euros (Zemědělec 2012). Such a legal framework encouraged farmers to hide the formal transfer of property, although the farm was in reality taken

over by a successor. Due to the high costs, the legal change of owner was postponed to an inheritance procedure. The tax duty simply excluded the possibility of an early retirement scheme for farming.

Discussion

The process of farm-succession is severely shaped by the process of individualisation in society. The biographies are less predictable (Chiswell 2016) and the members of the younger generation do not always follow the tradition. However, this does not necessarily mean that young people are less interested in farming, but the process of farm-succession has become more complex and less straightforward. This hold especially for the CEE countries due to the specific historical trajectory.

Farm succession patterns in the Czech Republic demonstrate a specific trajectory because of historical development and events (collectivization, restitution and transformation) that built so-called "wider circles" in the biographies of family farms. The first post-socialist generation of farmers faced major changes in agriculture in the early 1990s that were often considered a crisis (Hudečková and Lošťák 1995b). During this period, farm families could easily have lost a potential successor. This period was better managed by the family farmers who were able to restore the script of family farming and renew the past tradition that had existed before collectivisation in the 1950s. This tradition concerns both the family property needed for farming and the upbringing of a new generation to take over the farm.

The meaning of restitution and economic transformation was interpreted differently in families with a strong peasant tradition (who 'returned' to agriculture) and in families with a weak peasant tradition (who started businesses in agriculture). This differentiated framing in families of great historical events and their understanding illustrates the key mechanism described by Fischer and Burton (2014) in the endogenous succession cycle. The first generation of the post-socialist farmers needed to turn their farms into economically viable businesses and, at the same time, make them – from the perspective of another generation – success-worthy.

The empirical study also shows that the succession process in the Czech Republic is in many ways comparable with other countries regardless of the specific historic context. Among the most important ones are the

"farm ladder" approach (Keating and Little 1994), latent preferences for male successors (Mann 2007) and tendency for individualisation (Chiswell 2016). A comparative study conducted by Errington (2002) noted key differences in succession among England, France and Canada. In countries with a slow process of farm succession, it became common for members of the younger generation to establish parallel farms that were more or less related to the "mother" farm. However, the situation in the Czech Republic was not favourable for developing this trend. Family farms, which have been gradually restored since the early 1990s, were growing rapidly, and family members had to be involved in the increasing volume of farm work instead of beginning another farm. Members of the older and younger generations had to work together under ad hoc agreements. Our study indicates that such agreements enabled the formation of important requirements for the future succession and the future successors' acceptance of the work on the farm.

Conclusions

This empirical study identifies specific features of the succession processes in relation to exogenous factors. The Czech case is characterised by the fact that the script of family farming, which is crucial for the continuity of farming over generation, was not based on the materiality of living on the farm but was embedded in *a symbolic narrative of living on the farm*, since the materiality of living on the family farm was not available to the families whose property was collectivised during the period of collectivization (1948–1989). This mechanism enables family farms to partially overcome significant exogenous factors and the absence of a narrative of continuity based in fact.

Results of the study also confirm the existing critique of the administrative tools that target inter-generational turnover on farms. It documents the fact that fruitful succession is not determined only by financial support (the subsidy amount was crucial only for new entrants), and the motivational effect of this measure is relatively small (young farmers who acquired family farms under this measure would take over their parents' farms in any case). Thus, when discussing efficient succession, it is more important to consider the approach of the younger generation to farming and the

extent to which working on the family farm can accomplish their personal visions and ambitions.

Farmers can adjust their activities to meet the required conditions to receive financial subsidies. However, the succession process for family farms copies its own trajectory, which depends more on the real life-cycle of the farm than on policy measures and the subsidies related to them. Administrative tools innovate relationships between older and younger farmers, and create artificial models of cooperation that are only indirectly related to the process of farm succession.

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