



## Multifunctional Agricultural Policies: Pathways towards Sustainable Rural Development?

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**Abstract.** The article starts from two assumptions: it understands global shocks as both social-ecological crises and, as a way out of them, offering sustainable development. Sustainability in the area of agricultural policies and rural development is inherently connected to multifunctionality, a leading principle of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

To make a real estimate of the contribution of multifunctional agricultural policies to sustainable rural development, this article argues that the possibilities need to be discussed of integrating different and partly contradictory rural development goals and objectives. An understanding of sustainable development is therefore developed whose purpose is not to unify the un-unifiable, but which asks for sustainable economies that preserve and regenerate society's ecological and social functions.

This is the heuristic background against which two CAP documents are analysed: the rural development regulation EFRAD, on the one hand, and the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development on the other. The analysis demonstrates the multiple biases and internal contradictions proposed that make it hard to identify pathways towards sustainable development.

As a result, two interpretations of multifunctional agricultural policies are generated: *adaptation* sees multifunctional agricultural policies from a critical perspective, and argues that the economic mechanisms and strategies that have led to the crises in rural areas are reproduced rather than reflected upon. *Transformation* introduces a visionary perspective in its argument that multifunctional agricultural policies lead to a changed and extended perspective, so that (re)productive economies can be developed and established, and a transformation process initiated towards sustainable rural development.

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'We have to open the conceptual door to find ways for more articulation of alternative and robust forms of sustainable adaptive capacity building, even when these tendencies are under attack from corporatized neo-liberalism, which attempts to marginalize and fragment their legitimacy' (Marsden, 2012, p. 258).

## Introduction

There can be no doubt that Europe's rural areas are facing multiple challenges, such as a structural change in farming, damage to the environment, the emergence of new consumer concerns, a decrease in population or the enlargement of the EU. These challenges raise the question of a 'new rural paradigm', which not only addresses agriculture in terms of primary production, but views rural areas as spaces for working and living (Van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003; Marsden, 2006; OECD, 2006; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Multifunctional agriculture, a new pattern for the EU's rural development, is supposed to be such a new paradigm. This is what the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) wrote in a seminal publication on multifunctionality in agriculture: 'Beyond its primary function of supplying food and fibre, agricultural activity can also shape the landscape, provide environmental benefits such as land conservation, the sustainable management of renewable natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity, and contribute to the socio-economic viability of many rural areas' (OECD, 2001, p. 9). Thus multifunctionality stresses the social and environmental significance of agriculture, and focuses on a broader economic basis for rural development by creating income opportunities in addition to primary production. As a leading principle of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) multifunctionality therefore aims to integrate the EU's priorities of competitiveness and sustainability.

Against this background, the key question discussed in the present article is whether multifunctional agricultural policies do indeed open up ideas, rationalities and options for action that seem to be pathways to sustainable rural development and help to overcome rural crises. This question offers a fairly new critical perspective on the debate on multifunctionality, which has so far mainly been criticized because of its protectionist character whereas its contribution towards sustainable development is rarely questioned. This article argues that in order to assess its real contribution, what is needed is a debate of the possibilities and limits of integrating different and partly contradictory rural development goals and objectives.

In the second section of this article, one of the main issues of this volume, global shocks, are conceptualized as social-ecological crises. Social ecology is connected inherently to sustainable development, which is also supposed to be a vision for rural development. In accordance with the social-ecological perspective, an understanding of sustainable development is therefore developed whose purpose is not to unify the un-unifiable, but which asks for sustainable economies that preserve and regenerate society's ecological and social functions. The theoretical orientations presented in the third section refer in particular to the (re)productivity concept as an interdisciplinary approach that brings together a critical analysis of social-ecological crises with the visionary perspective of sustainability as an integrative concept. As sustainability in the area of agricultural policies and rural development is inherently connected to multifunctionality, the fourth section introduces multifunctionality as a paradigm of the CAP and offers some insights into the theoretical, economic

and political aspects of this concept. This furnishes the theoretical and empirical background against which two CAP documents are scrutinized in the fifth section. The analysis of the rural development regulation EFRAD, on the one hand, and the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development, on the other, demonstrates multiple biases and internal contradictions in the instruments and strategies proposed in these two documents, which make it hard to identify pathways towards sustainable development in accordance with the understanding of (re)productivity introduced earlier. The concluding remarks bring together critical and visionary arguments for multifunctional agriculture policies, arranged systematically in three groups, for the political, scientific and local levels.

### **Global Shocks as Social-ecological Crises**

Rural areas have always been confronting multiple crises, such as failures of crops, animal diseases or wars. Today's rural crises, however, have the character of 'global shocks'. This is so because there is, first, hardly any limitation of crisis phenomena regarding their geographical scope as well as the regulative level of policies: both are indeed characterized by globalization. Second, the intensity of crisis phenomena has changed dramatically. Not only has the depth of intervention increased but so has its duration. As a result the globalized rural crises have the nature of shocks.

Although there is no doubt about the existence of such crisis phenomena, there is no agreement on how to describe and interpret such crises. With regard to the German research programme Social-ecological Research,<sup>1</sup> which is linked to international sustainability and global change research (Becker and Jahn, 2003, p. 93), the argument of the present article is based on an interpretation of global shocks as social-ecological crises. This perspective is the first to allow an interdisciplinary conceptualization of crisis phenomena, which brings with it the need to relate to one another the description, interpretation and methodological approaches of the natural and social sciences. Second, the social-ecological perspective opens up a trans-disciplinary viewpoint by taking into account the empirical reality of local actors, as well as their experience and strategies in facing these crises. Third, research in agriculture and rural development can have recourse to a broader theoretical and empirical basis, such as the German research programme Social-ecological Research (Brand, 2006a, 2006b; Schäfer, 2007; Feindt et al., 2008) and the international debates on social ecology in the context of rural development (Marsden, 2003a, 2006). In summary, social ecology is about the diverse, mutual relationships between nature and society, the way science deals with these intertwined relationships and, finally, the question of how they are regulated by political decisions.

Among the various approaches dealing with these questions, Social-ecological Research opens up a unique theoretical framework, called 'societal relations to nature' (Jahn and Wehling, 1998; Becker and Jahn, 2006c). In concrete terms, the concept tries to avoid disciplinary reductionisms by considering the relationships between nature and society not only from a socially (sociocentric) or a naturally oriented (naturalistic) perspective but follows an approach that connects both to a so-called intermediary perspective (Kropp, 2002, p. 270). Thus the concept is defined by three axioms (Jahn and Wehling, 1998, p. 82): the idea of an irrevocable connection between nature and society, the acknowledgement of a difference between them, and the thesis that this difference is historically constituted. Although nature and society are connected materially and symbolically in reality, they are distinguished from each other for

analytical purposes. This differentiation seems to be necessary to understand how nature and society are contrasted in science, politics and everyday life and what the consequences of these differentiations are (Becker and Jahn, 2006a, pp. 87 ff., 2006b, pp. 164 ff.).

Against the background of this concept, social-ecological crises are interpreted as crises of societal relations to nature. Hence, there are no longer mainly isolated environmental problems that could be described by the natural sciences and resolved by technological means. The new forms of crisis endanger the reproduction of natural resources and the requirements of production and lifestyle for industrial societies. In order to solve these crises, the concept of 'societal relations to nature' gives a theoretical orientation to the understanding and analysis of nature–society relations both in general and also in empirical specifics (Jahn and Wehling, 1998, p. 93). Agriculture and rural development can be seen as one such empirical specification.

Thus, the complexity of rurality and its construction by means of everyday life, scientific analysis and political regulation (Woods, 2011) need to be understood as an expression of societal relations to nature. Obviously, living and working in rural areas has always been connected with specific material and symbolical relations to nature (Van Koppen, 1997, 2000; Milbourne, 2003; Castree and Braun, 2006; DuPuis, 2006). Agriculture especially addresses nature as two complementary ideas: first, as material condition and result of production processes; second, as diverse and even contradictory symbolical meanings, such as the idea of a rural idyll where nature and society are harmonically related to each other, or of a threatening nature that needs to be controlled. Finally, societal, political and technological transformations have led to historical changes in rural relations to nature.

As a result of those transformation processes, today's rural areas have to face multiple social-ecological crises. Feindt (2008, pp. 30–34) locates the reasons for these various social-ecological crises in the co-evolution of modern agriculture and agrarian policy as well as in distorted markets, overproduction and 'unintended side-effects' (Beck et al., 2003, p. 2), such as heavy ecological damage to the quality of water and soil, climate change, etc. In economic terms, agricultural production is not profitable and therefore needs to be supported by governments. And lastly in social terms, structural change leads to modified working conditions and property situations in rural areas, with negative effects on small-scale farming, whose farmers are often forced to give up agricultural production (Feindt, 2008, pp. 26, 34–36). It can be said, then, that these crises of societal relations to nature in rural areas are an expression of sustainability problems, for the developments mentioned can hardly be described as sustainable either with regard to nature or with regard to society. At the same time, however, sustainable development is supposed to be an answer to these crises and is therefore promoted by science (e.g. social ecology as a scientific approach) and politicians (e.g. rural development policies).

### **Is 'Sustainable Development' a Vision for Rural Development?**

Science and politics regard sustainable development as an answer to global shocks when seen as social-ecological crises. The idea of sustainable development does indeed address the crises of societal relations to nature and asks for socially and ecologically viable economic developments. The idea of sustainable development is a normative one, because the concept follows the two principles of, first, justice, and, second, the integration of different needs. The claim for justice addresses present as

well as future generations (intra- and intergenerational justice). The claim for the integration of different needs addresses different stakeholders and is often linked with the differentiation of ecological, economic and social needs, which are at the same time related to each other. Both principles were taken as a basis in the early publications on sustainable development – for example, in the so-called ‘Brundtland Report’ (WCED, 1987) – and run like a red thread through the discourse on sustainable development. Despite this lowest common denominator, neither science nor politics completely agree on what kinds of development qualify as sustainable and what do not.

It is for this lack of agreement that sustainability is characterized as a ‘controversially structured field of discourse’ (Brand and Fürst, 2002, p. 22). Within this heterogeneous field a distinction between at least three approaches can be established (Friedrich et al., 2010, pp. 12 f.). There are, first, those approaches that start from the assumption that different dimensions of sustainability can be integrated without any problems, with e.g. synergies being anticipated as a result of integration processes. This position is particularly dominant within the political mainstream of sustainable development and was strengthened in the Rio follow-up process.<sup>2</sup> What was a great success, under the heading of ‘Green Economy’, was the idea of improved human well-being and social equity with a simultaneous reduction of environmental risks and ecological scarcities (UNEP, 2011). Second, those approaches must be mentioned that regard the requirement for integration as challenging, because they have serious doubts that an unproblematic integration of different needs is possible. These approaches come in a positive and a critical variety. They can refer positively to the sustainability concept and participate in the normative specification of which developments might be regarded as sustainable. Current examples from Germany are the approach of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres (Kopfmüller et al., 2001; Kopfmüller, 2006), the theory of ‘strong sustainability’ (Ott and Döring, 2008; Egan-Krieger et al., 2009) or the concept of the ‘caring economy’ (Biesecker et al., 2000; Netzwerk Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften, 2013). Nevertheless these approaches can also have reservations concerning the sustainability approach or even reject the whole debate, in which case the argument is found that the whole discourse appears to be blind to issues of power and domination (Eblinghaus and Stickler, 1996). Further, sustainable development is not thought to be a vision to solve any global shocks, whether in rural development or any other policy field, but is held instead to be more than a way to continue in this critical manner. This article directly refers to these controversial understandings of sustainability and aims to develop a critical perspective on those approaches that tend to mask conflicting goals and interests by pretending to have achieved their integration.

This article is based on an understanding of sustainable development that does not set out to unify the un-unifiable, but asks for sustainable economies that preserve and regenerate society’s ecological and social functions. In referring to the research project ‘Blocked Transition? New Thinking and Action Spaces for Sustainable Regional Development’, I assume that to take the principle of integration seriously means to develop an integrative view of spheres that are usually thought of as separate. The integration of economic, ecological and social issues requires a reconceptualization of these spheres and a new definition of their specific qualities that takes into account their multiple interrelations (Behrendt et al., 2007, p. 85).

A sustainability approach that meets these requirements is the concept of (*re*) *productivity*, developed by the economist Adelheid Biesecker and the environmen-

tal scientist Sabine Hofmeister, who employ an interdisciplinary approach to combine economic and ecological views of societal relations to nature (Biesecker and Hofmeister, 2006, 2010). The concept serves two purposes, the first of which is to open a critical analytic perspective on the separation and the establishment of hierarchies between the spheres of 'reproductivity'<sup>3</sup> and productivity. Its second aim is to offer a visionary perspective: in the new category of (re)productivity the two spheres are no longer separated but become one.

The origin of this critical perspective is the so-called 'debate on housework' (Bock and Duden, 1977), in which feminists highlighted the untenability of the separation of female 'reproductive' work, which is mainly care work, and male productive labour, which is gainful employment. 'Reproductive' work, they argued, has to be understood as productive in itself. Consequently, such a critical perspective leads to criticisms of economic rationality: the separation of 'reproductive' from productive work is a result of the industrial era, during which only work that was of countable economic benefit was valued as real work. Interestingly, Biesecker and Hofmeister broaden this critical perspective by extending their approach to the sphere of nature, where the same problematic separation of production and 'reproduction' can be found. What both spheres share is economic externalization, whether of the productivity of women or nature, and the fact that both are at the same time an indispensable condition for production. Therefore they draw the conclusion that the crisis of 'reproductive' work and the ecological crisis have the same origin, namely an economic rationality that is neither able nor willing to acknowledge the productivity of 'reproductive' functions. The vision developed by Biesecker and Hofmeister does not constitute a commodification of 'reproductive' functions but defines a new kind of economic rationality. Within this new rationality the two categories of productivity and reproductivity have been collapsed and become one, which is signalled by the single label they attach to the new category, '(re)productivity'. There is no process of 'othering' any type of work or qualities as 'reproductive'. Rather, they ask for the 'productivity of the reproductive'. As a consequence of this new perspective, our understanding has changed of what the economy is about, of what is valuable and what is worth preserving. In summary, the (re)productivity concept provides an analytic framework for sustainability science and policies that is dedicated, first, to the critical analysis of social-ecological crises, and, second, to the visionary conceptualization of societal relations to nature that are able to solve or avoid global shocks.

Although the (re)productivity concept was not developed for rural studies or agrarian policy, it has nevertheless turned out to be a fruitful approach to the analysis of changes in rural development both at theoretical and empirical levels (Mölders, 2008, 2010). The central question whether a new economic rationality should be given scope for development is an issue controversially discussed in the rural development literature (Marsden, 2003a, 2003b, 2006; Perkins, 2006; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Marsden (2006, p. 202) in particular criticizes 'the maintenance of an agro-industrial model of agricultural development that continues to devalue and subsume the primary production sector through the adherence and propagation of liberalization and globalization logics', and demonstrates that sustainable rural development goes hand in hand with 'a complete rejection of the homogenizing tendencies of the neo-liberal, global modernization project' (Marsden, 2006, p. 207, with reference to Sevilla-Guzmán and Woodgate, 1999, p. 304). He therefore asks for 'new theoretical frameworks that go decisively beyond the postulates of the previously dominant approach of agricultural modernization and industrialization' (Marsden, 2006, p. 202),

and poses the question of a ‘new rural development paradigm’ (Marsden, 2006). An example of such a new paradigm is held to be multifunctionality. The crucial question, which is further discussed below, is therefore whether the conceptualization of multifunctionality in agrarian policies meets the stated demand for alternative economies or, to put it more succinctly, for (re)productive economies as pathways towards sustainable rural development.

**Multifunctionality as a Paradigm of the CAP**

Policy changes in agriculture are often discussed as paradigm shifts, which cause changes in the hierarchy of goals, types of instruments and instrument settings (Hall, 1993; Coleman, 1998; Josling, 2002; Moyer and Josling, 2002; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). In general, three conflicting agricultural paradigms are distinguished: first, a ‘dependent agriculture’, which needs government support and is therefore also labelled as ‘state-assisted’ or ‘protectionist’; second, a ‘competitive agriculture’, which is able to compete for resources and follows the idea of market liberalization; third, a multifunctional agriculture, which combines the production of commodity and non-commodity outputs. Overall, different nations and supranational institutions (e.g. WTO, FAO, EU) pursue different paradigms due to different perceptions of problems as well as different strategies for resolving these problems. As a result, negotiations about agriculture and rural policies can be interpreted as discussions about different agrarian paradigms, which are at the same time negotiations about different societal relations to nature (Marsden, 2003a, 2006, pp. 203–205).

Within this conflict situation, the EU’s CAP puts a strong emphasis on multifunctionality (Van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003). Basically, agricultural production is a multifunctional economic activity per se, the reason being that agricultural production not only provides primary agricultural products (food and fibre) but causes multiple, interconnected outputs and effects (e.g. structuring the landscape, creating agrobiodiversity). The definition that follows is based on the OECD publication *Multifunctionality: Towards an Analytic Framework* (OECD, 2001), which provides a working definition of multifunctionality and a terminology in terms of the economy and politics that is used mainly in scientific and political contexts: ‘The multifunctionality of agriculture can be defined as the joint production of commodities and non-commodities by the agricultural sector’ (Durand and Van Huylenbroeck, 2003, p. 1; Table 1).

Whereas the OECD represents a positive concept of multifunctionality that stresses the multifunctional characteristics of economic activity as such, the EU refers to it as a normative concept that sees multifunctionality as something desirable. Fol-

**Table 1.** Outputs of a multifunctional agriculture.

Commodity outputs		Non-commodity outputs	
Food and fibre	Rural tourism	Food security / safety	Rural landscape
Transformation of products	Taking care of the elderly or disabled	Rural ways of living / traditions	Biological diversity
Other marketable products		Soil conservation	Health and other non-commodity products

Source: Durand and Van Huylenbroeck, 2003, p. 4.

lowing this understanding, multifunctionality 'takes on a value itself' (OECD, 2001, p. 14; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, pp. 7–11) and is interpreted as an objective value worth supporting. Within this normative framework, the challenging question is therefore how to provide those non-commodity outputs of agriculture that, although they are socially desired (public) goods and services, are not or only poorly coordinated by markets. This is so for two reasons: following multifunctionality as a leading principle allows policies both to support agriculture and farmers in spite of the declining significance of agriculture as a productive space in rural areas, and to meet society's new demands for non-commodity outputs of agriculture and rural areas as a consumptive space (Durand and Van Huylenbroeck, 2003, p. 1). Whereas those nations that are in favour of a competitive agriculture (e.g. U.S., Australia, New Zealand) blame the EU for continuing a dependent agriculture under the shelter of multifunctionality and for using the new paradigm to legitimize subsidies, the EU argues that further liberalization will also cause further rural crises whereas a multifunctional agriculture opens up new perspectives in terms of a sustainable rural development (Durand and Van Huylenbroeck, 2003; Gallardo et al., 2003; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007). Thus, it would seem that it is above all the multifunctional and the competitive agricultural paradigms that are interpreted as conflicting within agricultural policies.

The EU started to develop and introduce the multifunctional paradigm in the 1990s, when it was an implicit part of various EU legal contracts. Although the term 'multifunctionality' itself is not used, the 1996 Cork Declaration is considered to be the starting point of the EU's multifunctional agricultural policies. It is in this document – an outcome of the European Conference on Rural Development held in Cork (Republic of Ireland) – that the participants both presented an analysis of the situation of the EU's rural areas and set up a 10-point rural development programme. The analysis points to substantial changes in the significance and public perception of agriculture, both of which have led to an understanding of agriculture as a multifunctional practice. Agriculture is characterized as 'a major interface between people and the environment' (European Commission, 1996). A case is made for agriculture because of its uniqueness and importance as well as its competitiveness. An argumentative framework is thus established that aims to realize an agriculture that meets new social and environmental demands and is competitive at the same time. This idea of multifunctionality is made concrete within a 10-point rural development programme. Here 'sustainable rural development' is introduced as a 'rural preference' (point 1). Point 4 offers a brief definition of sustainable rural development, 'which sustains the quality and amenity of Europe's rural landscape... so that their use by today's generations does not prejudice the options for future generations'. In addition to sustainability, the idea of multifunctionality is also connected with a call for 'integration' (point 2) and 'diversification' (point 3) (European Commission, 1996).

The conceptualization of rural development as an integrated approach takes into account that rural development is multi-sectoral, because rural development is influenced by various policies (regional planning, environmental policies, etc.) that need to be integrated in a multifunctional paradigm. This means that they need to be related to each other in terms of processes and contents in regional governance approaches (Marsden and Bristow, 2000). These multiple activities that contribute to the viability of rural areas are addressed by the idea of diversification. Indeed, many farmers enlarge their range of products and services produced and sold. Moreover,

diversification can be accomplished by the strategy of pluri-activity, which means the addition of non-agricultural activities (Durand and Van Huylenbroeck, 2003, p. 12; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 8). Both approaches are essential to the multifunctional paradigm because they draw attention to the various functions related to farms and farmers and their contributions to rural areas. In summary, it can be stated that with the Cork Declaration the need for a paradigm shift in agrarian policies was articulated and a rural development programme was drafted that defined the normative orientation of the new multifunctional paradigm as sustainable, integrated and diverse rural development.

Agenda 2000 (European Council, 1999) is usually considered a second milestone on the way to a European multifunctional agriculture. The reform of the CAP was indeed a main concern of the Agenda 2000 project, which was completed by the EU in 1999. The reform pursued a number of aims:

‘to increase the competitiveness of Community agricultural products on the domestic and world markets, to integrate environmental and structural considerations more into the implementation of the common agricultural policy, to ensure a fair income for farmers, to simplify agricultural legislation and decentralise its application, to improve food safety, to strengthen the Union’s position in the new round of WTO negotiations and to stabilise agricultural spending in real terms at its 1999 level’ (European Commission, 2013).

It was above all the objective of integrating environmental and structural considerations into the CAP that had an impact on rural development policies. Following the integrative approach as well as the idea of sustainability, environmental and social issues became more and more important for rural development policies under the shelter of the multifunctionality paradigm. As a result, the Agenda 2000 package for agriculture has been supplemented by a regulation on rural development. This Rural Development Regulation (RDR) (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1257/1999, *OJ L 160*, 26 June 1999, pp. 80–102) was the beginning of a genuine second pillar of the CAP, promoting rural development in contrast to the first pillar, which aims to realize a competitive European agriculture (Lapping, 2006, p. 118; Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 24). In brief, the second pillar has since then been used as a synonym of multifunctionality, and aims to realize sustainable agricultural activities that effectively produce social and environmental values.

A somewhat more detailed definition of the two paradigms would be to say that although the first pillar is mainly characterized by the competitive paradigm, it also contains elements of a dependent agriculture as seen in policies like market interventions, coupled subsidies and direct income support. Moreover, such policy instruments as cross compliance or modulation need to be interpreted in the light of the multifunctionality paradigm (Gallardo et al., 2003, p. 173). Similarly, in the second pillar the multifunctionality paradigm appears to be the leading principle, but the realization of this principle by governmental support for non-commodity outputs connects it closely to the dependent agriculture paradigm. Finally, the idea of multifunctionality is also linked with the idea of competitiveness, for rural areas are expected to be competitive (Gallardo et al., 2003). In conclusion, European agricultural policy as realized within the CAP is characterized by a mix of paradigms with a strong tendency towards multifunctionality. This orientation causes changes in the agricultural budget as well as in the use of policy instruments. In short, it is a matter

of providing incentives for the production of non-commodity outputs. In order to realize a multifunctional agriculture the EU refers to different policy instruments: voluntary policy instruments, incentive-oriented policy instruments, and regulatory policy instruments (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, pp. 25–28; Wüstemann et al., 2008, p. 104).

This brief summary of the EU's multifunctionality policy illustrates that multifunctionality is conceptualized as a strategic goal for rural crises in terms of social-ecological crises, and therefore for the integration of social and environmental needs in agrarian policies. Against this background, multifunctionality and sustainability are often used interchangeably in scientific and political contexts. When referring to the possibilities and limits of integrating different and partly contradictory rural development goals and objectives, what is needed is a deeper insight into the policies and instruments in the multifunctionality paradigm.

### **Multifunctionality between Competitiveness and Sustainable Development**

During the current funding period (2007–2013), the EU's rural policies are framed by the rural development regulation of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EFRAD) (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, *OJ L 277*, 21 October 2005, pp. 1–40). Besides containing a set of measures directed to the three axes of 'improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector' (axis 1), 'improving the environment and the countryside' (axis 2), and 'the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy' (axis 3), the regulation includes also what is called 'Leader' (axis 4) and the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development that prioritize rural development policies (Council Decision 2006/144/EC, *OJ L 55*, 25 February 2006, pp. 20–29). The last two documents together form the second pillar of the CAP and thereby the programmatic and strategic elaboration of a multifunctional agriculture. Against the background of the issues of sustainable development and multifunctionality discussed so far, the pivotal question is how societal relations to nature are shaped through these multifunctional agricultural policies and in how far these societal relations to nature can be qualified as sustainable in accordance with the understanding of (re)productive economies elaborated above.

The results presented here are based on a detailed document analysis of the EFRAD and the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development. Within this qualitative approach it is assumed that even policy documents represent convictions and interests of a strategic content. The heuristic background of the document analysis is formed by the theoretical considerations regarding the sustainability discourse, in particular the conflicting goals and interests that might be masked by the appeal of integration.

EFRAD as well as the Community Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development follow two EU priorities, competitiveness and sustainable development. EFRAD states this orientation in its first recital: 'Rural development policy should [integrate] other major policy priorities as spelled out in the conclusions of the Lisbon and Göteborg European Councils for competitiveness and sustainable development' (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, *OJ L 255*, 21 October 2005, rec. 1). Thus, rural policies explicitly refer to sustainable development, and substantiate their understanding of sustainable development with reference to the Göteborg Strategy. The mention of the Lisbon Strategy refers to the priority of competitiveness, which

represents a further development goal that needs to be harmonized with the aim of sustainable development. In the next sections of this article, I will therefore discuss in greater detail the ways in which sustainable development and competitiveness are conceptualized and related to each other under the umbrella of a multifunctional agriculture paradigm.

### *What Kind of Sustainable Development?*

Since the late 1990s, the EU has tried to implement in its policies the idea of a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations. In June 2001 the EU launched the first EU sustainable development strategy (SDS), known as the Göteborg Strategy 2001 (European Council, 2001). Although the thematic background to this strategy was the European environmental policy, the 14 sections of the Göteborg Strategy go beyond environmental aspects, which are nevertheless the focal point of the strategy (Gottschlich, 2014). Above all, the Göteborg Strategy completed the Lisbon Strategy: it added a third, environmental dimension to economic and social renewal. This means that the environmental aspects of the Göteborg Strategy first became part of the Lisbon Strategy, while the whole of the Göteborg Strategy was next supposed to bring sustainability into the mainstream of the EU's policies. In the terms of the three approaches of sustainability distinguished in the third section of this article, the European sustainability strategy can clearly be classified as an approach that starts from the assumption of unproblematic options for the integration of different needs and even expects synergy effects. It is these assumptions and expectations as reflected in the policy documents analysed that I will turn to now.

Most obviously, the idea of sustainability is addressed generally in terms of sustainable economies. According to EFRAD, these sustainable economies mainly try to achieve environmental goals. At first glance it would seem that the idea of integrating economic and environmental objectives is realized. However, a closer look shows that such sustainable economies are proposed specifically for those areas that are not as competitive as others. Thus, it says in recital 33 of EFRAD: 'Natural handicap payments in mountain areas and payments in other areas with handicaps should contribute, through continued use of agricultural land, to maintaining the countryside, as well as to maintaining and promoting sustainable farming systems' (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, *OJ L 255*, 21 October 2005, rec. 33). Hence, an area is either competitive or – if this primary development goal cannot be reached – an area for the realization of sustainable development.

In the context of the question whether the integration of economic and environmental goals has been achieved, even agri-environment payments need to be discussed as they frequently serve as an example of successful sustainable agriculture. This is what recital 35 has to say on the matter 'They [agri-environment payments] should further encourage farmers and other land managers to serve society as a whole by introducing or continuing to apply agricultural production methods compatible with the protection and improvement of the environment, the landscape and its features, natural resources, the soil and genetic diversity' (Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, *OJ L 255*, 21 October 2005, rec. 35). From this it appears that agri-environment payments are part of axis 2, 'improving the environment and the countryside', and not of axis 1 'improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector'. By characterizing environmentally friendly agriculture as commitments that cause 'additional costs and income foregone' (Council Regulation

(EC) No 1698/2005, *OJ L 255*, 21 October 2005, art. 39, cl. 4), the separation of competitiveness from environmental protection is reinforced rather treated as an issue that remains open to debate. In short, it is assumed that environmentally friendly agriculture cannot be part of a competitive agriculture because it works against this economic goal. This is the reason why it needs additional remuneration.

In summary, it can be stated that the EFRAD regulation as well as the Community Strategic Guidelines Concerning Rural Sustainable Development shape societal relations to nature that conceptualize nature primarily as a precondition for competitive production. Sustainable agriculture is supposed to be realized where this condition is either not fulfilled (natural handicap areas) or the protection of nature is preferred to its use (agri-environment payments).

### *What Kind of Competitiveness?*

The use of the term competitiveness within EFRAD and the Community Strategic Guidelines refers to the Lisbon Strategy as passed by the European Council in March 2000 (European Council, 2000). As an action and development plan for the EU economy for the period 2000–2010, the Lisbon Strategy aimed to make the EU ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (European Council, 2000). As stated above, economic, social and environmental renewal as well as sustainability was to be integrated into this strategic goal, because the idea of a ‘green and innovative economy’ works on the assumption that economic growth goes hand in hand with promoting social and environmental objectives. Again, this orientation is reflected within the two policy documents.

The competitiveness of rural areas is obviously a key category of the second pillar. Thus axis 1 of EFRAD, ‘improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector’, is dedicated explicitly to this development goal. In addition, numerous measures of axes 2 and 3 (e.g. the diversification of the rural economy) as well as most of the basic assumptions (e.g. ‘a context of increased competition’ (Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005, *OJ L 255*, 21 October 2005, rec. 24)) focus on a liberalized market economy.

Following the Lisbon strategy, competitiveness is interconnected with modernization and innovation as a driver of economic development. However, in combination with the Leader approach (axis 4), an alternative understanding of innovation is presented that aims to strengthen local initiatives and local governance. Another constitutive element of competitiveness is efficiency: first, the rural development programmes are expected to be efficient; second, all production processes in agriculture and forestry are measured by their efficiency.

A striking example of this market-oriented understanding of competitiveness, and indeed all categories related to this development goal, can be found in section 3.3 of the Community Strategic Guidelines, ‘improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy’. This refers to axis 3 and proposes that, ‘the resources devoted to the fields of diversification of the rural economy and quality of life in rural areas under axis 3 should contribute to the overarching priority of the creation of employment opportunities and conditions for growth’ (Council Decision 2006/144/EC, *OJ L 55*, 25 February 2006, p. 26). The exclusive reference to ‘employment opportunities’ and ‘conditions for growth’ demonstrates a narrowness of approach regarding the quality of life, which is reduced to participating in gain-

ful employment and rising financial prosperity. Thus the variety of work in rural areas in the form of housework, care and voluntary work, etc. is excluded from this strategic approach, as are all alternative economic movements that stress the significance of those activities for the quality of life of a community whose value cannot be expressed in monetary terms (e.g. local currencies, exchange rings or neighbourly help).

To recap, concerning rural competitiveness the EFRAD regulation as well as the Community Strategic Guidelines shape societal relations to nature that conceptualize the economy as a liberalized market economy in accordance with too narrow an understanding of innovation, work, and the quality of life, etc.

This critical analysis of rural policy documents allows at least three interim conclusions. First, framing multifunctional agriculture by means of the two priorities of sustainable development and competitiveness creates a field of tension that hovers between possibilities of integrating ecological, economic and social needs within rural areas and the limits to these opportunities. Second, sustainable development tends to be reduced to environmental issues. The protection and improvement of the environment is linked to economic losses, which need to be compensated. Third, the priority of competitiveness dominates not only the first pillar of the CAP but also multifunctional agriculture as the paradigm of the second pillar. The consequence is the dominance of a neo-liberal economy, which is characterized by hierarchies, the separation of economic spheres (between e.g. production and reproduction), and an exclusive focus on monetary values.

#### *Multifunctionality between Adaptation and Transformation*

For the question of how far societal relations to nature shaped by multifunctional agricultural policies can be qualified as sustainable in accordance with the understanding of (re)productive economies introduced above, two interpretations can be generated that also reflect the ongoing debate about sustainable rural development.

The first is the interpretation of multifunctional agricultural policies as *adaptation*. This reading focuses on the adaptation of the supposedly 'new' paradigm to the 'old' understandings, rationalities, valuation patterns, etc. concerning the categories of nature and (rural) society. As Marsden (2003b, p. 22) puts it: 'The recent policy reforms under Agenda 2000, in addition to the new rural development regulation, expose a policy framework which will do little to shift the basic philosophy beyond its bias towards the industrial model.' The problematic separation of a productive from a reproductive sphere seems to be reproduced by the current rural development policies rather than critically reflected upon. The persistence of this separation also becomes obvious in the language used in political as well as in scientific debates, when, for example, productive and non-productive activities and investments are distinguished. Gallardo et al. (2003) make explicit reference to the differences between 'competitiveness and the productive function of agriculture' and 'non-competitiveness and the non-productive functions of agriculture'. Hence the authors suggest the support of a 'dual agriculture' (Gallardo et al., 2003, p. 174) with measures dedicated explicitly to a competitive *or* a multifunctional type of agriculture. Although their approach is meant to be a contribution to strengthen the social and environmental aspects of farming in terms of sustainability, it still remains in a dichotomic, non-integrative pattern. Following the proposed interpretation of adaptation, the distinction of productive and non-productive functions seems to be in

agreement with the incompatibility of competitiveness and sustainability. The idea to commodify the non-commodity outputs and to remunerate non-productive functions of agriculture by monetary means could be seen as an attempt to take over the 'reproductive' sphere by the productive sphere rather than the establishment of a new economic rationality that asks for (re)productive qualities. In short, multifunctionality appears as an adaptation to traditional and mainly unsustainable agricultural policies because of its maintenance of an unquestioned neo-liberal economy.

The second interpretation of multifunctional agricultural policies sees them in terms of a *transformation*. Despite the mainly critical results of the document analysis, this reading opens up a visionary perspective on multifunctional agricultural policies in as much as it understands multifunctionality as an idea for the realization of a new rural development paradigm that offers pathways to sustainability, which is the way that e.g. Van Huylenbroeck et al. (2007) interpret multifunctionality. Although the authors also remain committed to the distinction between the productive and non-productive functions of agriculture, they argue that multifunctionality offers 'some grounded conceptions to encompass ideas on the restructuring of the farming sector' (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 24). They explicitly refer this restructuring process to economic rationality and demonstrate, for instance, that multifunctionality does not reject efficiency completely, but only suggests measuring efficiency not exclusively in profit terms but also in terms of socially desired outcomes (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 24). Furthermore, they discuss the extension of the definition of competitiveness with regard to multifunctional agricultural policies, by taking environmental and social functions of agriculture are taken (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 2007, p. 29). This new economic rationality embodies the concept of (re)productivity in that it follows the idea of bringing together the spheres of production and 'reproduction'. Policy measures that help to provide alternative ways of production and marketing (e.g. regional marketing or farm shops that both support the protection of traditional livestock and guarantee the maintenance of farmers) might be interpreted as attempts to enlarge the view of what is 'productive nature' and what is 'productive labour'. Following this interpretation, it could be argued that within multifunctional agriculture those products, services and qualities are considered and valued that are not valued in a competitive agriculture, which exclusively follows the liberalized agro-industrial model. In making visible the 'productivity of the reproductive', multifunctionality thus would appear to involve a transformation process towards sustainable development.

### Concluding Remarks

Within the controversial debate about rural sustainable development this article puts forward the argument that rural development policies are not only contradictory with regard to the different agricultural paradigms, which become apparent in the two pillars of the CAP, but also with regard to multifunctional agricultural policies themselves. It was shown that the attempt to integrate the EU priorities of competitiveness and sustainable development causes multiple biases and internal contradictions that make it hard to identify pathways towards sustainable development in accordance with the understanding of (re)productive economies.

Adaptation, the first of the two interpretations generated on the basis of this analysis, reflects these critical assumptions and doubts that global shocks in terms of social-ecological crises might be solved against the background of current policies.

Transformation, on the other hand, the second interpretation, opens up an optimistic reading of rural development policies by identifying a visionary potential, which might bring about transformation processes that point a way out of rural crises towards sustainable development.

The question is neither which of these interpretations is more appropriate than the other nor one of taking an either/or decision. Rather, what can be observed is a juxtaposition of both tendencies, towards adaptation as well as transformation. Current developments in rural policies as the new trends towards 'neo-productivism' (Almås and Campbell, 2012) influence this debate as well as the CAP in the next budgetary period. The latter requires an orientation towards the Europe 2020 strategy, which is the EU's growth strategy for the coming decade. Within this strategy the contradictory development goals discussed in this article become virulent once again: EU's economy should be smart, sustainable and inclusive. Moreover, the second pillar of the CAP seems to be rather weakened than strengthened. For these reasons it will be more and more difficult to implement sustainable rural development.

Which direction the future development of rural areas will take depends on the different actors on different levels, on their decisions, ideas, beliefs, rationalities, etc., as well as on the structures in which their actions are embedded. At least three levels may be distinguished:

1. Policies: to overcome global shocks is a primary task of policies. If policies devote themselves to sustainable development – as the EU's CAP has done – they will have to meet the challenge of how to realize this policy goal without any bias or contradiction. The multifunctionality paradigm, as discussed in this article, could be a step in this direction, but needs to be watched critically lest it be dominated by a neo-liberal rationality.
2. Science: those disciplines that aim to contribute to a new science according to sustainability sciences have to establish the nexus between different aspects of global shocks. For this, they need to overcome disciplinary boundaries and contribute to critical research that asks for a new space for thinking and action. Social ecology, as presented in this article, may well be seen as an attempt to realize such a kind of science.
3. Local level: in the last resort, it is local actors that have to deal with the conflicting goals and interests that are part of rural development politics. Despite these contradictions, local actors seem to be successful in realizing sustainable rural developments by establishing alternative ways of production and marketing. Those practices, which were only briefly sketched out in this article, need to be watched closely by politics and science in order to learn more about (re)productive economies.

These three groups are of the same importance when assessing global shocks in rural areas. With regard to problems, their analysis as well as their resolution, the three groups of scientists, politicians and local actors should question courageously traditional certainties, and work for the deconstruction of a destructive neo-liberal economy. With a view to the future, they should search for and practice alternatives in order to develop and to test pathways to sustainable rural development.

## Notes

1. Social ecology as a 'new science' has been set up by researchers of the Institute for Social-ecological Research (ISOE) since the 1980s (Becker and Jahn, 2003). In 1999 the Federal Ministry of Education and

- Research (BMBF) established Social-ecological Research as a funding programme with two objectives: first, the generation of transformation knowledge through the description of social transformations and the definition of options for future development: second, capacity building in an effort to produce bearers of theoretical and methodological knowledge (BMBF, 2009). This German approach needs to be distinguished from the international debates on 'social ecology' (Hunecke, 2006, pp. 19–22), particularly Murray Bookchin's ecological world view (Bookchin, 1990).
2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, has ensured that sustainable development is now part of international and national policy agendas and a development goal for the twenty-first century.
  3. The single quotation marks are to indicate the assumption that there is no 'reproductivity' besides productivity.

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