Role of Research and Researchers during Transition: Case Study of Lithuania

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„What was expected, what we observed,

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ABSTRACT

A review of more than 100 publications and papers by Lithuanian and external experts published from 1990 to 2006 in academic journals, books and monographs, proceedings and reports is the basis for this assessment of the role research has played in the policy evolution from 1990 to present. These studies had impacts on decision making, and there are also many ways in which the experiences of policy makers have informed the agricultural economics profession and improved our knowledge and understanding of the complexities of reform and transition. That is, the transition experience was in many ways a two-way and interactive learning process between researchers and policy makers and between east and west. We conclude that a key element in making research relevant and realistic was a process of frequent interaction among analysts and practitioners within Lithuania and among other transition country and external experts and practitioners.

Keywords: economic transition, EU accession, policy reform, collaboration, policy research

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformations that have taken place across the Central and East European region are truly remarkable. While early visions by "Washington Consensus" proponents of the unbounded promise of unleashing market forces across the region were naïve and unrealistic, the combination of wise policy decisions and good luck, sometimes tempered by poor policy decisions and bad luck, has resulted in some real success stories. We believe that Lithuania was one of these success stories and have an interest in tracking those factors that may have enhanced or impeded the transition process.

Every country that has progressed along the path from plan to market started from different initial conditions, confronted different constraints, and progressed at different rates. The Lithuanian case can be viewed as an informative one on the productive interplay of research and practice, though a very similar story doubtless evolved in other CEECs. Since there was little prior experience in the international economics profession that could serve as a true scientific base for assessing the magnitude and nature of the challenges and pitfalls that economic, social and political transition would bring, we argue that basic economic analysis had to be combined with a clear understanding of the initial conditions, social and cultural heritage, and practical constraints that can only be fully comprehended from within the transition countries themselves.

Many economic studies have been conducted during Lithuania's transition from central planning to market economy and continuing in the early years after EU accession. A review of more than 100 publications and papers by Lithuanian and external experts published from 1990 to 2006 in academic journals, books and monographs, proceedings and reports by the World Bank, EU, FAO, research institutes, universities and other institutions is the basis for this assessment of the role agricultural economics research has played in the policy evolution from 1990 to present. Perhaps more importantly, there are also many ways in which the experiences of policy makers have informed the agricultural economics profession and improved our knowledge and understanding of the complexities of reform and transition. That is, the transition experience was in many ways a two-way and interactive learning process between researchers and policy makers and between east and west. For example, a study could focus on some ideal way forward, while policy makers had to frame this in the context of what was possible within the political, financial, social and institutional constraints.

We discuss the role of collaboration, the role of research, and the contribution of research to policy making. A few of the many different types of reviewed publications are used as examples as these themes are discussed.

2. KEY ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

From the early days of transition, the role of networks and collaboration has been invaluable. It is from these joint efforts that most studies and documentations of developments in the Lithuanian agricultural transformation have been conducted and disseminated. The collaboration of the authors of this paper, in fact, began in 1989 with an agreement between the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) at Iowa State University and the Lithuanian Agrarian Economics Institute (LAEI). About the same time, agreements were launched between the Finnish Agrifood Research Institute (MTTL) and agrarian economics research institutes in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which included the Finnish-Baltic Seminar series that continued for several years and built lasting and productive collaboration. The CARD collaboration formed the basis for our participation in World Bank missions starting in 1992 and in the OECD expert meetings starting in 1993.

About the same time, the European, American and International agricultural economics associations were inviting and supporting participation of agricultural economists from this region, who presented papers and joined discussions to improve understanding and communication (KAZLAUSKIENE 1992; KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 1999). By the mid 1990s, the DG-Agri of the European Commission was using experts and networks of experts to obtain independent assessments of developments in agricultural markets and policies. Later, through EU research framework programs, networks of experts that spanned all candidate countries were formed to collect data, assess various aspects of food, agricultural, and rural policy and prepare reports for DG-Agri. We highlight the studies of the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries, which *inter alia* produced a major document on rural areas for the EU Salzburg Conference of 2004 and to support the rural policy restructuring for 2007-13, and the AGMEMOD partnership, which builds and maintains commodity models to analyze market and policy scenarios across the EU-27.

One can see from a survey of publications and papers that most of the studies have been a consequence of one or more of these joint efforts. We can conclude that the research and the building and strengthening of analytical networks were joint products of these collaborations. There was a sense of urgency about understanding the situation and analyzing the consequences of certain actions or inaction, because reform and transformation in Lithuania and other CEECs was taking place rapidly and there was little use for purely academic or highly theoretical research.

One very important aspect of the collaborations was the international interactions that took place. Examples of such productive interactions were the Finnish-Baltic and CARD-Baltic collaborations and the much larger OECD Ad hoc Group of Experts on East-West Economic Relations in Agriculture that met twice a year during 1993–1997 and its successor, the Expert Group on Agricultural Policies in Non-Member Countries 1997-2002. The EU Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries was in some ways a continuation of the important international interaction after OECD ceased this activity, and the AGMEMOD Partnership has a similar origin, though its mission is targeted differently. It is remarkable and very significant that many of the same analysts and experts that built close ties and good communication during the OECD expert group meetings have also participated in the EU network of experts and AGMEMOD Partnership. However, it is also important that new colleagues are joining in AGMEMOD, so capacity building is continuing.

Another important aspect of the international collaboration was the interaction among analysts, practitioners and policy makers. A USAID funded Dairy Policy project combined analysis, a workshop, and training visit to Iowa that involved researcher, industry and government participants. The successful Rural Loan Guarantee Fund scheme in Lithuania was

developed under a World Bank technical assistance project. An unsuccessful World Bank project was the Private Agricultural Development Project (PADP), which was not sufficiently tailored to local conditions, focused too much on very small farms and was never disbursed. The first market regulation agency and interventions purchase scheme in Lithuania was developed in consultation with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Grain Board. It was common for the World Bank and OECD and occasionally FAO to organize workshops or seminars where results of studies were presented and discussed with policy makers and other stakeholders (MEYERS, KAZLAUSKIENE AND GIUGALE 1999; OECD 2003, 1999). Most of these included participants from other Baltic countries and sometimes other countries, which broadened the scope of interaction. Even after World Bank borrowing ended in Lithuania, there have small studies and related workshops funded under technical assistance activities (MEYERS, KAZLAUSKIENE, NAUJOKIENE AND KRISCIUKAITIENE 2004).

Perhaps conditionalities associated with international agencies and EU accession should not be considered collaboration, but in many ways these were the most official collaboration. World Bank conditionalities in the structural adjustment loans gave strong emphasis to positive policy directions like bank privatization and liberalization of price and support policies, and gradually had effect. The persistent World Bank emphasis on permitting legal entities to have ownership of agricultural land was finally realized with the added support of the EU *acquis*. The *acquis* also included foreign ownership, which is being realized over a transition period. Other positive aspects of the *acquis* were improvements in competitiveness (quality and safety), advisory services, training and capacity building, while there may be negative impacts through CAP measures that tend to freeze the still inefficient farm structure and slow the farm restructuring that was taking place.

3. ROLE OF RESEARCH

The reviewed studies include a broad range of subjects, such as land privatization and farm restructuring (MEYERS AND KAZLAUSKIENE 1998, MEYERS 1999), macroeconomic reforms (KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 1994), markets and policies (KAZLAUSKIENE 1997A), trade policies and agreements (KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 2004, 2001; KAZLAUSKIENE 1998), credit and financial policies (MEYERS, KAZLAUSKIENE, NAUJOKIENE AND KRISCIUKAITIENE 2004), commodity market modelling and projections (KRISCIUKAITIENE, ANDRIKIENE, KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 2004, environmental policies (KAZLAUSKIENE, BUDVYTIENE AND BUDVYTIS 1995, MEYERS AND KAZLAUSKIENE 1994), rural development policies (MEYERS, KAZLAUSKIENE, NAUJOKIENE AND KRISCIUKAITIENE 2006), and developments preparing for EU accession (KAZLAUSKIENE 1997B, KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 1997, EUROPEAN UNION 2002B). Although academic knowledge was surely advanced through these studies, the principal purpose of all the studies we have reviewed was documentation of the reform process and the improvement of policy and economic performance for Lithuania. An important consequence and sometimes a stated objective was building and strengthening of the research capacity in Lithuania. There were basically three types of studies:

1. ex-post analyses, which were documentation of developments and applying economic principles to interpret or explain past tendencies
2. ex-ante analyses, which were projections and prognoses on possible consequences of proposed or suggested policy changes or external market shocks
3. policy advice or recommendations, which were mostly from World Bank studies

World Bank teams produced a number of specific as well as comprehensive studies, such as the first assessment of the economy (World Bank 1993), an analysis of agricultural reforms (CSAKI, MEYERS AND KAZLAUSKIENE 1998) and a policy note covering agriculture as well as

other key sectors of the economy (World Bank 1998). World Bank and FAO combined for an EU accession workshop (World Bank 1999). OECD produced the Agricultural Policy Review for Lithuania (OECD 1996b) and held a review session with government representatives. OECD also published proceedings of two Baltic workshops on agricultural policy (OECD 1999 and 2003), as well as annual policy reviews of all transition countries from 1993 to 2002 that were based on the information from expert meetings hosted by OECD all those years (OECD 1993, 1994, 1995,1996a, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). The World Bank also initiated a review of situations and policies in transition countries, including Lithuania, in 1998 (CSAKI AND NASH, 1998) that continued annually until 2004. These also included a somewhat subjective ranking of countries relative to their reform progress, but they did not have the benefit of vetting by country analysts as did the OECDs work.

The European Commission produced three pre-accession country studies of Lithuanian agriculture (in 1994, 1999 and 2003 - European Union 2002a), as well as the reports made by the Network of Independent Agricultural Experts in the CEE Candidate Countries (European Union 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b) and the AGMEMOD partnership (ERJEVEC, E., DONNELLAN, T AND KAVCIC, S. 2005). All of these were done through collaboration with country experts. The Commission and FAO also commissioned studies to be done by Lithuanian experts that became part of multi-country reports.

Another type of publication is the individual research paper or collection of papers in proceedings of seminars and meetings. Agrifood Research Finland, Economic Research (MTTL) published six volumes of papers prepared and presented by participants in the Finnish-Baltic seminars from 1990 to 1996. CARD initiated a Baltic Report series that issued 25 papers from 1991 to 1997, most of which were on Lithuania. Numerous other papers of Lithuanian authors or joint with Lithuanian authors were presented at professional conferences and appeared in journals and conference proceedings, primarily in Europe and North America. Some of the analytical papers also appeared in the Lithuanian language in journals, LAEI publications, government documents or agricultural magazines in Lithuania. These mediums have the effect of spreading the knowledge to a broader group of stakeholders. A few of the World Bank publications were also produced in Lithuanian for the same reason.

A key element in many of these collaborative studies is the development of tools and strengthening of analytical capacity. In the Lithuanian case, tools included policy modeling starting at CARD and LAEI (KAZLAUSKIENE, DEVADOSS AND MEYERS 1991) and continuing to AGMEMOD today (KRISCIUKAITIENE, KAZLAUSKIENE AND MEYERS 2004), PSEs (OECD 1993-2003, MEYERS 1996), case studies (CSABA JANSIK 2001), and comparative statics (VALDES AND KRAY 1999) among others.

We have counted more than 100 such publications from 1990 to 2006, and that only includes those that involved one of collaborations mentioned here. It does not include other collaborations that have multiplied in recent years or, for example, reports of the LAEI that appear regularly on various topics related to agricultural and rural development conditions and policies.

4. CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO POLICY MAKING

Aside from interactions and networking systems already mentioned, an important linkage between collaboration, studies and policy making is the fact that the same individual may be involved in all of these. In Lithuania, as in many other CEECs, researchers from institutes or universities were brought into policy making positions of the government and/or as advisors to policy makers. The knowledge and skills they developed as well as the networks they were

involved in were a scarce human capital resource and became a valuable asset for the Government, not only for domestic policy but for negotiations on international agreements. Negotiations on EU accession, WTO accession, multilateral and bilateral trade agreements were often conducted by such experienced experts. The senior author of this paper is one such example. She also was at one point participating as a local expert on a World Bank Structural Adjustment mission, and the next mission was on the other side of the table as Deputy Minister of Agriculture. This "inside-outside" process brings the analytical skills and comprehension of research implications into the policy making arena and also brings the understanding of the policy maker to the analytical process. In both cases, it enhances the research-policy making interface.

So the question of how research and analysis impacts policy making and policies is rather complex. In Lithuania, and possibly in most other CEECs, it is not a simple matter of whether this or that study was used by a government official in making a decision. It is more likely that the combination of networking, conducting analysis, discussing results in workshops and meetings, and exchanging ideas and experience among analysts and policy makers in other countries broadens the scope for decision making and has a greater effect on policy outcomes. This cumulative effect is the result of the entire process not only of a particular research effort. Add to this, the shifting positions of some individuals from research to policy making or advising, and the impact tends to grow. It is also the case that the Ministry of Agriculture in Lithuania has often asked the LAEI to design a program or recommend a funding allocation or mechanism, so the impact is extended to the policy implementation and program design as well.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We argue that research and researchers played a key role in the transformation progress and that the documentation and studies they produced served as catalysts rather than a prime movers in this process. Economic and social analyses, documentation of lessons learned by other countries, and especially interactions and collaboration among analysts and policy makers in different countries with differing views and experiences were all important. There were a variety of forms of international interaction, which combined to provide a productive interplay of analysis, policy decision and policy implementation.

The key lessons for the numerous countries still in earlier stages of transition are that there is no universal formula for success that can be easily applied from one country to another. However, the lessons learned and processes of collaboration and consultation that were so valuable in Lithuania, and probably also across the countries that have made notable progress in the past fifteen years, will be invaluable in providing these countries with increased opportunity for success in the future.

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