

LATVIAN URBAN YOUTH PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES OF FARMER AND AGRICULTURE

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Abstract. The article examines the theoretical approach of the terms stereotypes and occupational stereotyping. The term "stereotype" is seldom encountered in the sociological or economic papers dealing with farmer, farming, and agriculture. There are existing differences of characteristics of stereotypes; thus, the article will try to detect features described by Lipmann W., Dyer R., Oskamp S., Schultz R.W., and others. Some of the definitions offer a thought that stereotypes are oversimplifications or generalisations, while they are more complicated as it seems from the first sight.

The current article will discover sociological concern of how stereotypes function in social thought and the specific concerns how stereotypes function in urban youth thoughts. The article will distinguish negative, neutral, and positive stereotypes. The article will include both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to reveal Latvian urban youth perceptions and stereotypes of farmer and agriculture.

Key words: stereotype, occupational stereotype, urban youth.

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Introduction

Agriculture in Europe is expected to fulfil a variety of functions. It contributes to the supply of European citizens with safe and high quality food on a competitive market to maintain valuable cultural landscapes across Europe through sustainable land management and to help rural areas remain attractive. At the same time, agriculture is undergoing fundamental changes which require farmers to adapt to new conditions and seize new opportunities (European Commission, 2009). In the context of the importance of the agriculture, it is essential to raise understanding within the society that agriculture is particularly significant for economic development. Almost half of all agricultural workers are 55 years old or older. At the EU-27 level, there is approximately one farmer of less than 35 years old for each nine farmers of more than 55 years old (Young Farmers Statistics). Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness and popularity within youth as regards farming and agriculture.

The aim of the article is to discover sociological concern of stereotypes' function (by Lipmann W., Dyer R., Oskamp S., Schultz R.W.) in social thought and the specific concerns how stereotypes function in urban youth thoughts. The tasks of the article are:

- 1) to discover theoretical aspects of sociological stereotype backgrounds;
- 2) to reveal Latvian urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture;

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3) to analyse expert views of youth perceptions and agriculture sector issues.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied to identify Latvian urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture. Quantitative research approach was based on the urban youth survey to define and analyse the first phase of the research findings - identification of the Latvian urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture. Qualitative research methods were applied to identify the **opinions of the EU Member States' agricultural policy expert of youth perceptions and agriculture sector issues.**

Research results and discussion

In their way of expression, stereotypes vary in their nature and significance, while it also creates stamps and they concern tolerance of the society. In accordance with Dyer R., a professor at the **Edinburgh University, the term "stereotype" is today usually a term of abuse.** This stems from the wholly justified objections of various groups in recent years, blacks, women and gays, in particular, to the ways in which they find themselves stereotyped in the mass media and in everyday speech (Dyer, 1999). Stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving occupation, gender, national origin, and other factors. These characteristics tend to be oversimplifications of the groups involved.

The American journalist Walter Lippmann first introduced the term stereotype to the social sciences in 1922. According to Lippmann, stereotypes are employed to help impose order onto a complex world. **They present a shortcut in the processing of data, which, in his words, "precedes the use of reason".** Stereotypes are seen as dependent on cultural traditions, group interests, and the differentiation of the *in-group* from outsiders. As Dyer concludes, even schoolchildren hold stereotypes about ethnic groups, perhaps largely because of the effect of mass media (Seiter, 2006).

It is a commonplace that the mass media are populated with stereotypes. They are readily documented in various research works and data. Nevertheless, some of the society members strongly support and widely distribute them. Lippmann noted four characteristics that can bring a detailed explanation of stereotypes.

There are four characteristics of stereotypes.

1. Simple: They are far simpler than reality and often expressed in two to three sentences.
2. Acquired second hand: one acquires (and absorbs) stereotypes from cultural mediators (like the mass media) rather than from own direct experience with the stereotyped groups. The culture "distils" reality and then expresses its beliefs and values in stereotypical images that convince audiences of the "truth" of the stereotype by placing it in a carefully controlled context in which **there is a measure of truth to the image, for example, "Of course women can and should be thin and beautiful: Look at Julia Roberts!"**
3. Erroneous: All stereotypes are false – although some are less false than others are, and some are less harmful than others are. Because they claim that each individual human being in a certain group shares a set of common qualities, stereotypes are a logical impossibility. Even **countertypes presented as the "new" truth** about a group are false unless presented as possibilities rather than actualities.
4. Resistant to change: Even through race and sex inequalities have alerted most of us to the tragic consequences of stereotypes; nevertheless, old stereotypes still colour our perceptions.

Fortunately, stereotypes can change when one decides to break the mould and recast those pictures in our heads (Analysis and criticism, 2013).

There are various explanations of the term "stereotypes", while one of the most commonly used is a thought or assumption that may be adopted about specific types of individuals while these thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality (Lipmann, Dyer, Oskamp, Schultz).

In accordance with the Dyer term "stereotypes", there have been developed particularly stressing stereotypes as (i) an ordering process, (ii) a "short cut", (iii) referring to "the world", and (iv) expressing values and beliefs (Dyer, 1999).

Lipmann also observed a social function of stereotyping, namely, as a "projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights" (Lipmann, 1998). Some other theoreticians Oskamp and Schultz have described a stereotype as "picture in our heads" about various racial, national, or social groups – that is a perception of members of a given group as all being identical copies of each other, all having the same characteristics and traits (Oskamp, 2009).

The inherent problem is that a general stereotype influences the way one thinks and talks about individual members of a group. One related problem in an assessment of a stereotype as a centrality of the supposed characteristics – ambitious. As Lipmann is stating "... a great deal of confusion arises when people decline to classify themselves as we have classified them. Prophecy would be so much easier if only they would stay where we put them. However, actually, a phrase like the working class will cover only some of the truth for a part of the time. When you take all the people, below a certain level of income, and call them the working class, you cannot help assuming that the people so classified will behave in accordance with your stereotype. Just who those people and mine workers fit in more or less, but farms hands, small farmers, peddlers, little shop keepers, clerks, servants, soldiers, policemen, firemen slip out of the net." (Lipmann, 1998).

The current paper will discover sociological concern of Lipmann how stereotypes function in social thought and the specific concerns how stereotypes function in urban youth thoughts. The position behind all these considerations is that stereotypes are not as an aspect of human thought and representation; thus, it is important to discover how they are served in accordance with the occupational stereotyping of farmer's portrait.

Stereotypes and occupational stereotyping

When individuals interact in formal or informal groups with people from diverse social categories, their differences are more likely to be salient and, thus, more likely to activate social stereotypes associated with that category. For example, people from urbanised environment and people from periphery.

When stereotypes are well known but individuals are not known personally to each other, those stereotypes may affect both how individuals treat one another and how they view themselves. Many stereotypes exist about particular occupations. Occupational stereotypes are often activated in situations where people from multiple occupations come together to work on a shared task, such as architects, engineers, and contractors on construction sites. However, within a particular occupation, occupational stereotypes can be activated when group members come from different environments (Leonardi, 2013). It could be linked with environment that is characterised as an office or clerical work in the building and agriculture or fieldwork that is work in the open space.

Partly, persons acquire stereotypes through personal experience. However, because these stereotypes are a part of the beliefs and shared assumptions that societies have about different types of people and

groups, they are also a part of the society's collective knowledge. In order to socialise the members of society, these stereotypes must be explicitly, even if subtly, taught. Whether stereotypes are individual or cultural in origin, the emphasis on explicit beliefs is not surprising considering that the content of stereotypes has great intrinsic interest to both the person using the stereotype and the person targeted by it. Even when objectively wrong, stereotypes simplify social perception and serve as guidelines for social interaction (White, 2006).

A stereotype described previously in the article is used to categorise a group of people. For example, urban youth do not understand farmers, so they put them into classifications, thinking that everyone who belongs to this group needs to be or act accordingly. Therefore, simplified social perceptions are used in this respect.

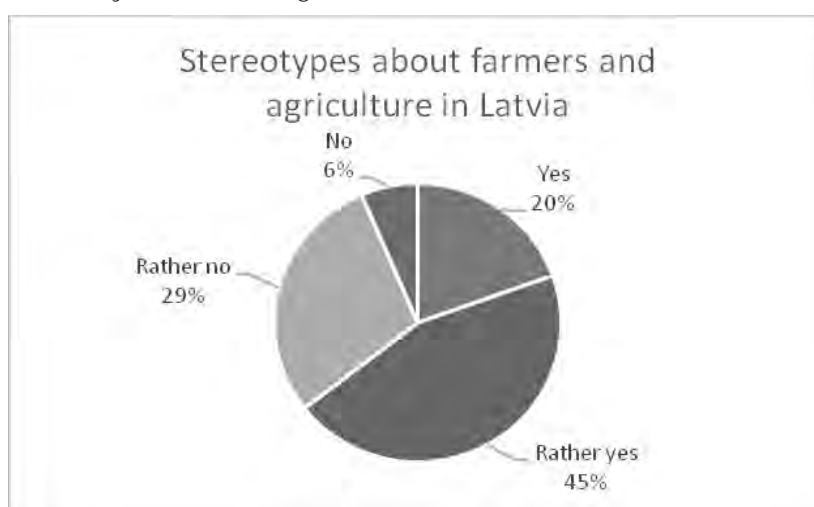
Urban youth stereotypes of farmer and agriculture

The observation behind the research on urban youth perception of the farmer is based on the theoretical approach of the term "stereotypes". Lippmann's notion of stereotypes as a short cut points to the manner which stereotypes are a very simple, striking, easily grasped form of representation but none the less capable of condensing a great deal of complex information and a host of connotations.

It is interesting to reveal stereotypes of Latvian urban youth perception to find out different assumptions of what farmer's role is in accordance with occupational context.

According to the United Nations concept, "youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community (UN, 2013). Keeping in mind that there are specificities between urban and rural communities, it has been essential to find out urban youth perceptions regarding farmer and agriculture. An urban community refers to a community that is mostly composed of residents in cities or towns and is referred to as a residential community.

In 2013, there was a research conducted where 950 urban youth from Latvia participated in to share their views and thoughts in survey regarding perceptions on **farmer's portrait** (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013). They indicated existing stereotypes about farmers and agriculture in Latvia. Overall, youth pointed that stereotypes existed while there were differences in evaluation of dissemination level. In the survey, 45% of respondents rather agreed that there existed stereotypes and 20% strongly agreed with this statement, while 6% of the youth did not agree with the statement and 29% rather disagreed.



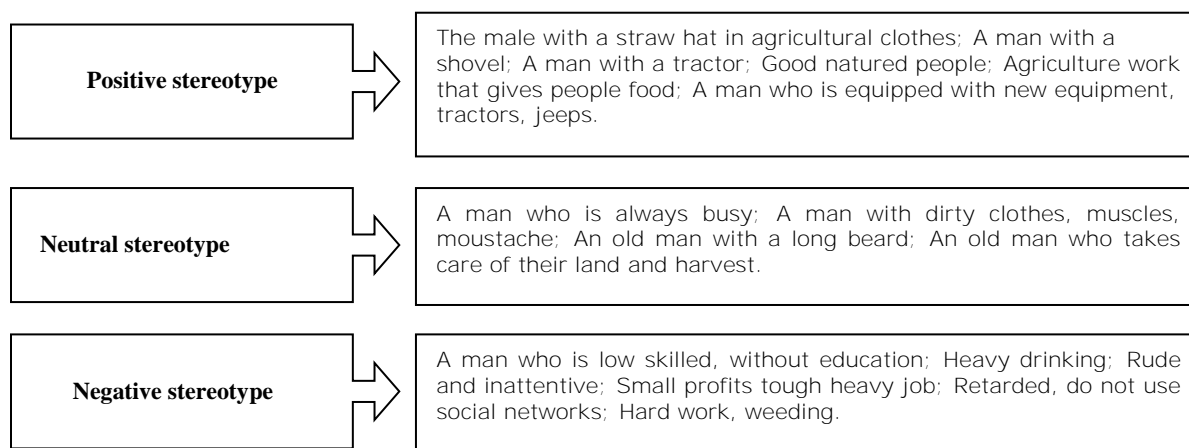
Source: Urban youth perceptions, 2013

Fig. 1. **Stereotypes about farmers and agriculture in Latvia**

As it was described by Lipmann, the term “stereotypes” holds thoughts or beliefs that may or may not accurately reflect reality. Youth reflect reality from the perspective of life in the city they are living and creating “picture in their heads” keeping in mind urban environment. Nevertheless, youth are influenced by the personal experience. Overall, youth think that farming is hard physical labour and stressful because of machinery breakage, weather uncertainties, and price variances. While there were also some little described advantages that agriculture might associate with, i.e. research, engineering, financial management, or international commodity markets.

Apart from the quantitative approach, respondents described their observations regarding specificity of the farmer and farming. The descriptions were diverse while the common part revealed occupational stereotype perspective.

Stereotypic categorisation helps the human psyche deal with uncertainties, generalise from limited data, and define the oneself and others. At the same time, stereotypes can be positive, neutral, or negative. There can be positive or negative characterisations and categorisations of a group of people based only on expectations or assumptions about the group rather than on individual who composes the group (Analysis and criticism, 2013).



Source: *Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013*

Fig. 2. **Stereotypic categorisation**

In accordance with the research (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013), it was possible to divide the most prevailing categories into three stereotype categories – positive stereotypes, negative stereotypes, and neutral ones.

Overall, people use stereotypes as a simplification tool, which helps them in their everyday life make decisions faster. Stereotypes can never illustrate the objective variation that exists but doubtlessly they contain a grain of truth.

In accordance with the experts view on the urban youth perceptions on *Farmer’s Portrait*, there were more fundamental views that arose of stereotypes and might have been influenced by the mass media. *“Media and advertising are creating a flavour or backdrop for drama and advertising, they hold outdated or misconceived ideas”* (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013).

There is an opinion that the role of journalists might affect youth perceptions. *"I think if journalists have to report about farmers and agriculture they start consciously or unconsciously from those stereotypes and although they try to describe an objective picture, in some respect the stereotype will be a part of it. Unfortunately, a special case is the very successful TV series called "Bauer sucht Frau" (farmer seeks woman); in which through the special selection of participants I fear the first stereotype is encouraged"* (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013).

In accordance with the research (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013), the experts pointed that youth were thinking of an old stereotype about farmers that was not linked with modern life of a farmer. In addition, there was a statement that the youth stereotypes held one sight, only a bit of a truth and completely did not fit "the farmers".

In accordance with Lipmann, the term "stereotype" has journalistic origins. First, a stereotype was a type of printing stamp to make multiple copies from a single model. Lipmann used the term metaphorically in his book *Public Opinion* to describe the way as a society and as individuals categorise people – "stamping" human beings with a set of characteristics and creating a "picture" inside our heads. However, these pictures do not necessarily correspond to the world outside our head (Analysis and criticism, 2013). The summary at some point could be applied to the youth perception of the farmers and agriculture covering all four characteristics of stereotypes stated by Lipmann. This is because they are simple (they are formulated in a simple manner and can be identified in some sentences); they are absorbed from cultural mediators like mass media (work of journalists, TV shows, advertisements etc.); since stereotypes are described as possibilities, they are more of less false; and stereotypes are resistant to change (like stereotype about farmer in rubbery boots or unskilled and uneducated farmers).

Conclusions

1. Although, stereotypes are described as simplification tool that helps people in their everyday life **make decisions faster, still the consequences of stereotype's dissemination can raise a wrong** picture and opinion of farmers and their work, thus, leading to misunderstandings at a political, economic, and social basis. For decades, agriculture has been associated with the production of basic food. Agriculture plays a crucial role in the life of an economy. It is the backbone of the economic system. Agriculture not only provides food and raw materials but also employment opportunities to a very large proportion of population.
2. Based on theory, stereotypic categorisation helps the human psyche deal with uncertainties, generalise from limited data, and define the oneself and others. While problem is that a general stereotype influences the way, one thinks and talks about individual members of a social group.
3. Overall, stereotypical views of agriculture prevail among youth. Youth equated agriculture with farming, with old stereotypes that, in some cases, do not exist or do not correspond to the situation in modern farming. Some youth representatives have associations with technical or research aspects of agriculture; nevertheless, youth do not see large potential that agriculture could bring (research, engineering, financial management etc.).
4. Based on the research data, it can be concluded that Latvian urban youth have a stereotyped view of the countryside and farming sector. Since changing the stereotypes is a difficult and time

consuming process, it is advisable to disseminate not only information campaigns like "Back to Countryside" but also organise trips for school children to farms, arrange "green lessons" to discover work and main tasks in the organic farms to involve youth in the farm works.

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