

## **LATVIAN, LITHUANIAN AND POLISH URBAN YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE OF FARMER**

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**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is to investigate Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish urban youth perceptions of occupational prestige of farmer and to analyze factors determining farmer occupational prestige. The paper highlights the theoretical approach of the term "occupation" and "occupational prestige" in the context of farmer profession. Empirical data were obtained - urban youth survey and expert interviews to define and analyse the perceptions of occupational prestige of farmer profession.

The paper examines the difference of characteristics of occupational prestige reflecting theoretical approach described by Treiman D.J., Hodge R.W., Goyder J., Sorokin P. and Duncan O.D. in order to analyse farmer occupational prestige factors. As such, the term is seldom encountered in the sociological or economic papers dealing with farmer, farming and the EU Common Agriculture Policy.

The research findings present unequal character of occupations along dimensions – work conditions, salaries, aging, educational prerequisites. Changes of industrialization and information technologies shapes the way people percept farmer profession while still in urban youth view farmer occupational prestige is low. There are disparities as regards perception of different occupations, while the current paper will examine theoretical discussions of farmer occupational factors that determine farmer place in the occupational ranking and reveal urban youth perceptions and views on occupational prestige of farmer in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

**Key words:** occupation, occupational prestige, urban youth.

**JEL code:** Q18

### **Introduction**

The EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) reform modernizes sector and offers a new perspective through its response to the new economic, social, environmental, climate-related and technological challenges facing society (European Commission, DG AGRI). However, there exist challenges that are linked with farm structures; economic development (like difficulty to compete in terms of entrepreneurship; powerlessness in the food chain); environmental and social and demographic challenges (aging, inter-generational succession) in the EU Member States. The CAP seeks to encourage knowledge, innovation and greater competitiveness in order to reveal the potential of agriculture and food industry, while there are many indications that young people might not seek a career in agriculture due to many reasons among them concerns as regards labour income in farming. Due to the EU Agricultural Economics Briefs (2013/No 8) in 2010 there were 12 million farms in the European Union but most data sources tend to agree in saying that around 10 million

persons (in full-time equivalents) are employed in agriculture in the European Union (which represents less than 1 full time worker per farm). These 10 million persons working on the EU farms represent 5% of total employment (Agricultural Economics Brief). Apart from labour income in farming, there are some other factors that influence youth perception of agriculture as potential occupation, like poor living conditions in many rural areas and labour income in farming that lags behind incomes in non-agricultural sectors. All these factors are important in order to discuss the occupation prestige of the farmer and even more important it is to raise understanding within society as regards significant role of agriculture for economic development.

The paper discovers sociological concern of occupational prestige in the context of farmer profession in social thought (by Treiman D.J., Hodge R.W., Goyder J., Sorokin P. and Duncan O.D.) and the specific concerns how occupational

prestige is reflected by urban youths. Overall tasks of the paper are as follows:

- to discover theoretical aspects of term "occupation" and "occupational prestige";
- to reveal Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture;
- to analyze expert views of agriculture sector issues and to verify urban youth perceptions.

This paper represents a part of the results derived from the main findings of the research "Urban Youth Perceptions on Farmer Portrait", which was carried out in 2013. The both qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied to identify Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture. The research concerned quantitative research approach based on the urban youth survey to define and analyze the research results - identification of Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish urban youth perceptions of farmer and agriculture.

The urban youth survey is carried out in the secondary schools and universities of the cities in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (950 urban youth from Latvia; 908 from Lithuania and 1051 urban youth from Poland). An availability sample is used since elements are selected for availability sampling due to available and easy reach of respondents in the classes of the secondary schools and the first and the second year students at university. Expert views derived from COPA, COGECA network (European agricultural cooperative organisations representing institutions dealing with agriculture sector - Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Austria, Germany, the UK, Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Czech Republic and Slovenia).

The authors of the paper seek to find answers to the following research questions:

- what constitutes terms "occupation" and "occupational prestige" within theoretical discussion?

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- what factors determine farmer profession perception in urban youth view?

## **Research results and discussion**

### **1. Understanding occupational prestige and farmer profession**

Sociologists have studied occupational prestige for many years since 1965 (Goyder J. updates on Pineo P. and Porter J. works) as well as theoretical contribution by Hodge R.W, Treiman D.J. and Sorokin. Overall occupational prestige study results accepted view that prestige ratings are constant over time and across societies. There are different scientific views about occupational prestige ratings and characterising trends as regards prestige of occupation, while there are few studies dedicated to occupational prestige and farmers perspective.

Duncan's Socioeconomic Index of Occupations (Duncan O.D., 1961) has become one of the widely used occupational statuses in research of sociological studies. Duncan agreed that occupational status is one component of socioeconomic status, summarizing the power, income and educational requirements associated with various positions in the occupational structure. Duncan turns attention to farmer's occupational prestige through correlation between father's and sons' occupational status. He argues that farmers (including owners and tenants) have average prestige but very low socioeconomic status. Even more, Treiman concludes that sons of farmers who leave agriculture move into unskilled and semiskilled manual jobs, which have relatively low prestige. Thus from a prestige standpoint farmers' sons tend to experience downward mobility; however, in terms of socioeconomic status, they experience upward mobility (Treiman D.J., 1977). While this can hardly be considered an artefact since modern change of agriculture developments, such as information technology, modern agricultural production methods might attract urban people to agriculture. As Jongman

argues, agricultural landscapes are related to the new urban-rural relationships, where a growing proportion of people (including a growing number of farms owners) living in agricultural landscapes are urban employees (Jongman R.H.G., 2004).

One of the leading authors of the sociological theory that has contributed to the study of social mobility is a Russian scholar Pitirim Sorokin. Sorokin used the concept of social stratification in his studies of mobility. Social stratification, which he considered to be a permanent characteristic of a social system, can be seen in three distinct forms: 1) economic stratification, which is based on differences between the rich and the poor; 2) political stratification related to authority and power; and 3) occupational stratification, in which a system recognizes some occupations to be more respectable than others (Odekun M., 2006).

In accordance with Sorokin, the stratification is based on two main factors:

- 1) importance of the occupation group survival and integrity for preservation purposes;
- 2) intellectual level that is needed for professional duties (Sorokin P., 2005).

Those professions that are related to the group organization and control functions are socially important. They are located in the core of society and have a variety of privileges and power.

This is well reflected in the hierarchy of occupations by professor Tausig classification:

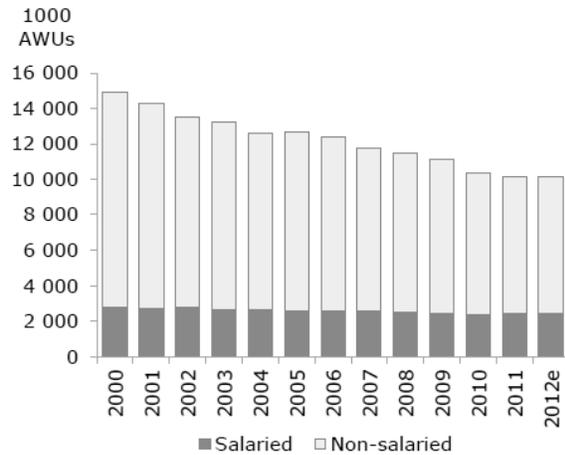
- 1) senior officials and large entrepreneurs are at the bottom of the pyramid;
- 2) medium and small entrepreneurs, well-paid civil servants group;
- 3) skilled workers group;
- 4) unskilled workers or black workers (Sorokin P., 2005).

It is obvious that this classification is based on the intellectual potential and control of power loss, accompanied by wage reduction. Furthermore, Goyder argues that changes in occupational prestige are a sign of the shifting

Jelgava, LLU ESAF, 21-22 April 2016, pp. 65-67 nature of values in a meritocratic society since income inequality is a growing reality (Goyder J., 2009). The changes of industrialization shapes the way people see many occupations. The meaning of post-industrial society was referred to the information society. The post-industrial society is largely due to the shift in the kinds of work and the processing of information technology. There is much emphasis on information processing and therefore, sometimes the emerging post-industrial society is also called information society. There is a lot of innovation in the information technology and energy production that have the potential to make a huge impact on the farm.

According to the Goyder, occupation prestige navigates individuals in society and it is one of the ways how individuals identify themselves. Furthermore, Goyder finds that prestige as such concerns not only subjective aspect of occupations but also culturally and socially constructed, in relation to collective behaviour. Occupational prestige reflects culture and proceeds to exert consequences (Goyder J., 2009). Sometimes prestige can be referred to fashion aspect that relates with individual status in a society.

Occupations differs and are unequal along many dimensions - work conditions, salaries, wages, educational prerequisites. Work conditions might differ in a way of arrangement of workplaces, some take place in clean, safe and comfortable work, others in surroundings of dirt, danger and discomfort. It has never been more important than today that salaries and wages differ and are unequal (Goyder J., 2009). From the perspective of evolution of agricultural labour input in the European Union, in 2012 there were 10.1 million of full-time equivalent jobs in the agricultural sector, of which 76% were carried out by non-salaried (family) workers. Figure 1 reflects proportion of salaried and non-salaried workers in the EU



Source: Eurostat, 2013

Fig.1. Difference of salaried and non-salaried workers in the EU

Consequently, prestige shift is related to income shift, since income is one of the several criteria in measuring prestige.

Goyder recognizes that development of technologies might rank farmer profession higher, while important factor is technological skills and content of jobs (Goyder J., 2009). This also means agriculture professionals need to use technological development and attract young people. However, Europe's farmers are getting older because of fundamental economic and demographic factors. The ageing of the agricultural population results from a combination of two things: a reduced rate of entry by new young recruits, and a reduced rate of retirement or exit by older farmers (CAP Reform, 2012). Age is not necessarily related in a negative way to higher productivity in agriculture but it might be obstacle of the further development of farms.

In the context of the importance of agriculture, it is essential to raise understanding within society that agriculture is particularly significant for economic development.

Age structure of agricultural employment and especially the ageing of farm holders, is the result of a complex set of factors, among which the most notable are the persisting low level of factor productivity in agriculture and the presence of inter-sectoral labour force movement

Jelgava, LLU ESAF, 21-22 April 2016, pp. 65-68 in the intermediate age classes (CAP Reform, 2012).

This last phenomenon, in turn, is the result of migration from urban to rural areas of retirement age persons, in search for cheap housing and/or a more relaxed and country-like lifestyle (Brown J., 1992).

As described previously in the paper, belonging to certain occupational group is used to categorize a group of people in the social mobility. However, new technology can provide additional rural employment and productivity but there are always countervailing pressures to reduce labour input and lower its costs due to exploitation of technology.

## 2. Urban youth perceptions of occupational prestige of farmer in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

The common characteristic of Latvian and Lithuanian farms was focus on small family farms, as this farm type constituted the majority of agricultural enterprises. The reestablishment of private farms was determined by different factors:

*First*, privatization had been recommended by the EU and the World Bank, as the smaller, privately owned farms were the only way to secure sustainable development in the future.

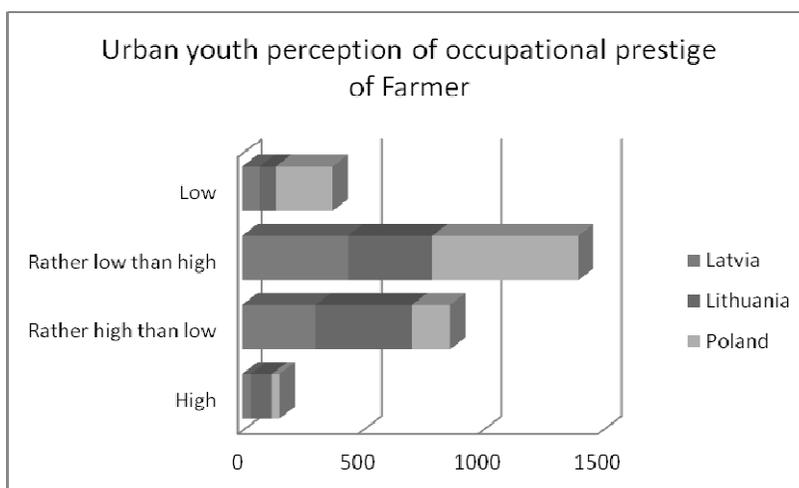
*Second*, privatization was driven by strong political and economic motives, signalling Western Europe that Lithuania was ready to undergo a rapid de-Sovietization and adapt to liberal democracy and market economy.

And *third*, the reestablishment of family farms was perceived as a solution to the immanent problem of environmental pollution in Lithuania – a result of Soviet industrialization and the giant collective farms in the countryside (Knudsen, 2013). Obviously, Europeanization processes leads to changes in patterns that affect family structures and relations between genders and generations. Cimdirina A., Raubisko I., Priedite A. agree that many farmers choose to remain in

agriculture because they like the lifestyle and have an attachment to a home which may have been in the family for many generations (Cimdina, Raubisko, 2012).

Survey in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013) revealed the urban youth opinions and perceptions of farmer (general perceptions, most visible stereotypes, view on occupational prestige). Urban youth did indicate existing stereotypes about farmers and agriculture and reflected their view as regards occupation prestige of farmer profession in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In general, urban

Jelgava, LLU ESAF, 21-22 April 2016, pp. 65-69 youth are rather sceptical as regards farmer occupational prestige; only 3% (Poland), 4% (Latvia) and 10% in Lithuania respond that occupational prestige is high. The majority of respondents agree that farmer occupational prestige is rather low than high – 59% (Poland), 51% (Latvia), 39% (Lithuania). Lithuanian respondents are more optimistic as regards farmer prestige since they tend to say that farmer occupational prestige is rather high than low 44% (Lithuania), 36% in Latvia, 15% in Poland.



Source: Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013

Fig.2. Occupational prestige of farmers in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland

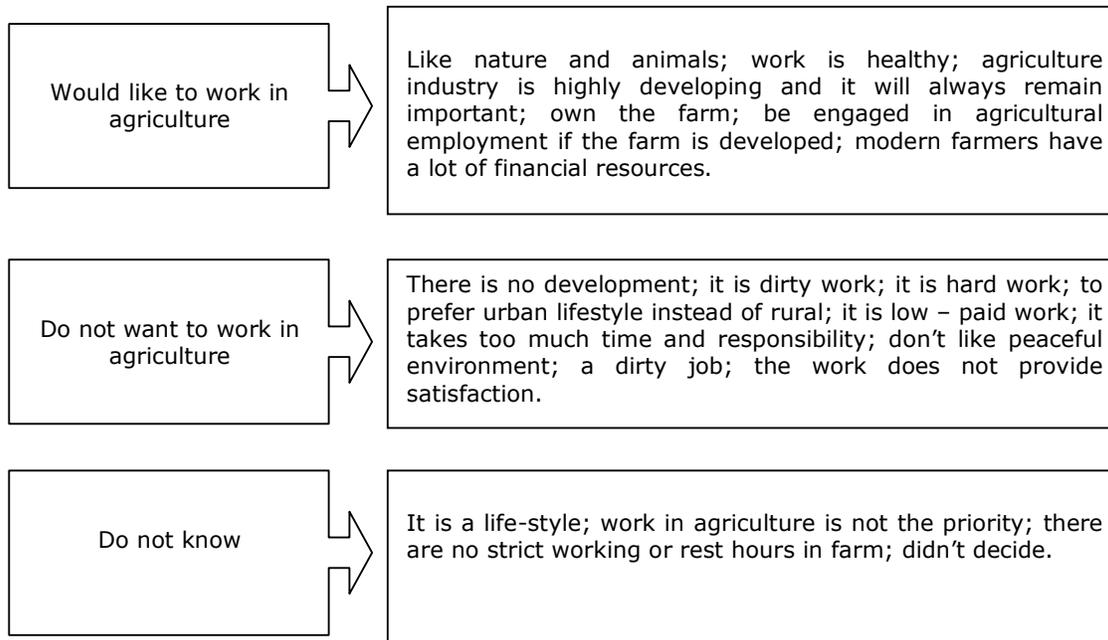
Apart from the quantitative approach, respondents did describe their perceptions of the farmer and farming. Urban youth reflected their views as regards employment in the field of agriculture. Youth reflect reality from the perspective of their personal experience.

Overall, youth think that farming is hard, physical labour and stressful because of machinery breakage, weather uncertainties, and price changes of agriculture production. Youth think that work in agriculture is unstable and unpredictable. While some respondents described advantages that agriculture might bring like - working outside is healthy, there are animals and nature in the farm, agriculture industry is highly developing and it will always remain important. Some of the respondents mention that modern

farmers have a lot of financial resources. However, regarding potential further professions youth mentioned the following professions and occupations in agriculture: agronomist, veterinarian, gardener, manager (for example, manager of the organic farm), book-keeper, researcher, engineer, financial manager, tractor driver. While some other respondents describe that they are not very much interested in working in the agriculture sector because they do not see much prospect in the future of agriculture, they do not see agriculture as an active profession in the long term.

There are no strict working or rest hours, it is work that never ends and people who work as farmers need to like what they do, otherwise

they will not feel satisfied. Respondents agree



Source: *Urban Youth Perceptions, 2013*

Fig. 3. **Individual motivation to work in the field of Agriculture**

In accordance with experts view - the EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) face many reforms, while it also brings many benefits to farmers (for example, direct payments). It is clear that the CAP absorb around 40% of the EU budget. The availability of the EU financing results in development of better working conditions, use of technologies and development of farms in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. It is obvious that some of the youth find not only negative aspects of farmer portrait but also potential benefits.

Some other expert from Slovenia mention that farmer profession prestige is quite critical since there is a lack of respect of profession among farmers, lack of education and low-paid occupation in general.

Lithuanian expert continued that from youth perspective - youth parents and relatives worked hard for all their life in agriculture, thus youth do not want to sacrifice their lives and not ready to take over the parents farm.

Some experts described the role of journalists, mass media that affect youth perceptions of farmer occupation.

There is some perspective in the expert view, like development of agrotourism or organic farming becoming increasingly popular. These sectors are among the most popular since people realize that low quality of food will affect their health and tend to choose better quality food and think what they eat and where they buy their food.

**Conclusions, proposals, recommendations**

- 1) In accordance with theoretical discussion, occupational prestige study results reflect view that occupational prestige is constant over time and across societies.
- 2) Changes of industrialization and information technologies shapes the way how youth percept farmer profession in the future.
- 3) Agriculture, for decades, had been associated with the production of food. Therefore, agriculture plays a crucial role in the life of an economy. It is the core element of the EU economics.
- 4) Agriculture not only provides food and resources but offers employment opportunities to a very large proportion of population.

- 5) Occupations differ in work conditions, some taking place in clean, safe, and comfortable work places, others in surroundings of dirt, danger, and discomfort that stimulates to see occupations from different aspects.
- 6) Encouraging more young farmers into the EU agriculture is important since gender change in agriculture is slow. Many older farmers choose to remain in agriculture because they like the lifestyle and have an attachment to a home which may have been in the family for many generations while it does not mean that younger generation will remain in the country side.
- 7) Young people might not seek a career in agriculture since work in agriculture are hard, low prestige of occupation, poor living conditions, low labour income in farming.

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8) In general, urban youth are rather sceptical as regards farmer occupational prestige. Youth tend to think that profession is rather low than high. Youth think that work in agriculture is low paid and takes too much time and responsibility.

9) Farmer profession perception is determined by the work conditions, salaries, aging, educational prerequisites.

10) On the basis of the research data and analysis - Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian urban youth develop stereotyped view of the farmer and agriculture.

11) In accordance with experts view, youth perception of agriculture might change if developing better working conditions, using technologies in the farm and developing agrotourism and organic farming.

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