Extrafamilial farm succession: an adaptive strategy contributing to the renewal of peasantry in Austria

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ABSTRACT
This article examines extrafamilial farm transmission, a process that brings together elderly farmers without successors and young people who aspire to farm but face various economic, social and cultural barriers to enter into the sector. First-hand accounts of the process from Austrian smallholders are systematically analysed to produce a stage-by-stage model. The multigenerational non-familial agrarian partnership this represents offers an alternative mechanism for maintaining small-scale food production and improving food security and food sovereignty. It is recommended as an adaptive strategy for the survival and re-generation of peasantry in the twenty-first century.

RÉSUMÉ
Cet article examine la transmission extrafamiliale des fermes, un processus qui rassemble des agriculteurs âgés sans successeurs et des jeunes aspirant à l’agriculture mais confrontés à divers obstacles économiques, sociaux et culturels. Les témoignages de première main recueillis à propos de ce processus auprès de petits exploitants autrichiens sont analysés systématiquement pour produire un modèle par étapes. Le partenariat agraire multigénérationnel non-familial ainsi configuré constitue une alternative pour maintenir la production alimentaire à petite échelle et améliorer la sécurité et la souveraineté alimentaire. Il est recommandé comme stratégie adaptative pour assurer la survie et la régénération de la paysannerie au XXIe siècle.

Introduction: extrafamilial farm succession as an alternative for small farms

This article examines the process of extrafamilial farm succession, the transmission of a farm between non-kin, by collecting and analysing first-hand experiences from Austrian farmers. The detailed analysis of the multigenerational constellation and intergenerational cooperation can reveal how this “unconventional transmission pattern” (Ingram and Kirwan 2011, 919) may contribute to the re-emergence of the peasantry, as theorised by van der Ploeg (2010).

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The dominant corporate-driven agricultural system of industrialised countries and the global system of trade and markets seriously affect the smaller-scale producers who provide nearly 70 per cent of the world’s food supply, and shape the socio-, economic-, and ecological landscape in all countries (HLPE 2013). Although smallholder farming is the foundation of food security, the survival of the sector is seriously risked by several factors: “Food and agricultural systems in the world are undergoing dramatic changes, becoming increasingly globalized, concentrated, industrialized and science-intense” (FAO 2013, 101). Beside facilitating overall growth and increasing efficiency, these production practices create competitive barriers for small- and medium food producers and processors, leading to a gradual decrease in the number of smallholder farms.

The traditional, intrafamilial form of farm transfer, with the retiring farmer transferring knowledge, skills, managerial control and ownership of the farm business to the next generation (Lobely, Baker, and Whitehead 2010; Heistinger and Klein 2011; Borec et al. 2013), is often thwarted because of the migration from the countryside to towns, the tendency of “deactivation”, the reduction or complete elimination of agricultural activities (van der Ploeg 2008, 7), and the different career interests of the young generation in the family (Thomas and Vieth 2012).

In Europe, the survival of the agricultural sector itself is endangered by the unfavourable age structure of farmers – 33.5 per cent of European farm holders are 65 years or older, while only 7.5 per cent of the active farmers are under 35 years (Zagatar and Lostak 2012). As a result of the above factors, “in Europe, a farm closes its gates every 25 minutes” (Pérez-Victoria 2005, 212).

However, van der Ploeg, in The New Peasantries (2008), states that alongside the processes of agricultural industrialisation and deactivation, there is the clear tendency of “re-peasantization” – a quantitative enlargement and a qualitative strengthening of peasant agriculture, rooted in the locality, struggling for autonomy, reducing capital intensification and applying resource based, sustainable food production and distribution practices. The re-emerging peasantry strengthening the local, small-scale and community context, is “strategic to future world food security” (van der Ploeg 2010, 1). He stresses the necessity to “defend and strengthen alternative forms of agricultural production, of food production, of food processing and of food marketing”, and “to make these alternatives highly visible” (van der Ploeg 2017).

The extrafamilial farm succession mechanism (referred to as non-normative succession in Cassidy 2019, this issue) establishing a “multigenerational non-familial agrarian collaboration” (Salatin 2013, 13), can bring together elderly farmers without successors and young aspiring farmers who seek farming opportunities but are confronted by the closure of access to land, by the high farm start-up costs, and by various economic, social and cultural barriers (White 2011; McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka 2019).

Investigations of the extrafamilial farm succession process, a so far underinvestigated subject, in Austria were motivated by the practical initiative of the Österreichische Bergbauern- und Bäuerinnen Vereinigung, ÖBV – Via Campesina Austria, the Austrian member organisation of the worldwide peasant movement La Via Campesina, to set up an extrafamilial farm succession advisory service. The project of ÖBV, is supported by the Netzwerk Existenzgründung in der Landwirtschaft (NEL), part of the Farm Succession in Europe E+ Network (van Boxtel, Hagenhofer, and Handl 2016).
Although Austrian agriculture has traditionally been dominated by small-scale structures and large Alpine areas (Karner 2010, 11), it faces growing product standardisation in production and trade, increasingly competitive markets and a reduced public support for agriculture (Glauben, Tietje, and Vogel 2004). As in Europe in general, the tendency points towards larger farms: between 1995 and 2013, the average size of farms increased from 15.3 to 19.4 ha (Statistik Austria 2010; Eurostat 2015). The number of holdings between 2010 and 2013 was reduced by 29.6 per cent (Eurostat 2015). According to Vogel (2006), 11.7 per cent of Austrian full-time (Haupiterwerb) farmers and 24.2 per cent of part-time (Nebenerwerb) farmers have not designated a successor. While the lack of successors often drives Austrian farmers to give up farming and sell their holding, resulting in a continuous reduction and concentration of farms, there is a rising interest by young aspiring farmers to engage in extrafamilial farm succession. According to a research initiated by Landjugend Österreich in 2015, the percentage of extrafamilial farm successions related to the total number of successions in Austria still represents only 1.3 per cent (Quendler, Brücker, and Rel 2015).

The ÖBV initiative was based on the pioneering investigations of the extrafamilial farm succession mechanism by Christian Vieth, founder and manager of the German farm succession and business start-up advisory service hofgründer.de/hofsuchtbauer.de (Vieth, Roeckl, and Thomas 2008). It includes an overall analysis of the German legal and financial framework in which the farm succession might take place and the needs, expectations and obstacles actors may face in the process. In their guidelines, Vieth, Roeckl, and Thomas (2008) separate five stages (want, form, searching, handing/taking over, completion) through which actors should progress to successfully finalise the process.

**Research methods**

Data collection, aiming to explore the extrafamilial farm succession process with the application of qualitative research methods, was conducted by interviewing actors of ten extrafamilial farm succession processes in Vienna and in four regions of Austria (Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Styria, Salzburg). No official database being available about farms transmitted between non-relatives, the identification of the research cases required an intensive search. First contacts to actors involved in extrafamilial farm succession were provided by the Regionale Landwirtschaftskammer (Regional Agricultural Chambers) and by ÖBV. To extend the number of potential interviewees, the snow-ball sampling technique was applied successfully. The field research (semi-structured interviews) provided me first-hand information and a direct insight into the generation-specific experiences related to the extrafamilial farm succession process at its different stages. To extract relevant information, to structure and organise the collected data, I used qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000).

Transferors of the research cases were between 55 and 92 years old, five singles (three women and two men), and five hetero-couples, with both parts involved in farming. They were childless, except for two cases, where their heirs showed no interest in farming, or, due to the bad physical conditions were unable to continue the parental farm.

The age of successors, all couples with each partner possessing equal competence in farming skills and knowledge, was between 23 and 46 years. Six of them came from a farming family, but, for various reasons (such as brother/sister took over the family
farm, interfamilial conflict) they had been engaged in other jobs, still later on, they decided to farm. Beyond their experiences collected at home, many of them also completed agricultural education (from practical courses to university degree). The size of the farms transferred varied between 6 and 80 ha (arable land, grassland and forest) in different proportions. Farming profiles included forestry, agriculture, horticulture, cow-, sheep- and pig-keeping and horse farming.

To highlight the stage-by-stage extrafamilial farm succession process, the outcomes of the data analysis have been visualised by two generation-specific qualitative process models (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2009) in Figures 1 and 2, interconnected into a third, complete, multigenerational model, rendering separate and interlacing, possible circular and progressive movements (Figure 3). These models are thus theoretical representations of patterns identified in concrete cases. Deviations from the extrapolated process remain within the limits of the phases highlighted as common. They may provide practical guidance for future farm transferors and successors to prepare for farm succession with a non-kin.

The detailed process of extrafamilial farm succession

The extrafamilial farm succession process – the transfer of the ownership and control of the farm business, of the knowledge, labour, skills and management from the retiring generation to non-kin – inevitably affects both the retiring and the successor generations. For the elderly farmers (transferors) succession means the exit from agriculture with the possibility to stay on their own farm, while for the new generation (successors) it marks the start of a farming career (Lobley, Baker, and Whitehead 2010). Farm succession can, therefore, be considered as a “twin process” in which retirement and entry are “mirror images” (Lobley, Baker, and Whitehead 2010, 51). At the same time, both generations would like to ensure their well-being on the farm by ensuring its continuity.

Though extrafamilial farm succession is so far insufficiently discussed in the literature, academic investigations of the traditional intrafamilial form of farm succession suggest that the transfer itself is one of the most difficult stages even in the development of family farms (Errington 2002), the “major bottleneck in the farm life cycle” (Calus, van Huylenoobroek, and van Lierde 2008, 1). The biggest challenge during this period is to bridge the generation gap on the farm, in order to ensure the “smooth transfer” (Potter and Lobley 1996, 286) of immovable and movable property, knowledge and managerial control to the successor, while securing the well-being of both generations and the survival of the farm itself. The strong interconnection of family, land and business in the agricultural holding sets serious challenges for both the transferors and the successors. Succession, therefore, is not to be considered as a single event happening at the signature of the contract, rather as a long, complex and “fraught” process including different phases, moments, decisions and careful collaboration between the generations concerned (Lobley, Baker, and Whitehead 2010).

Generation-specific extrafamilial farm succession processes

Extrafamilar farm succession from the perspective of the transferor generation

The farm succession trajectory from the aspect of the elder generation (the transferors) is visually depicted by the first analytic model (Figure 1). As will be seen it contains ten
successive steps or phases, each one requiring strategic decisions as preconditions of the way forward. The ten phases are described briefly below.

1. **Managing the family farm**

Elderly farmers/farmer couples have been actively working on the farm, usually in full-time occupation for about 40 years. During this pre-succession period, they have invested time, energy and human and financial resources to maintain and further develop their activities. They are also motivated to maintain the farm, as the family heritage and their home during their old age. Declining physical condition and work capacity often make farmers incapable of performing basic farming activities, and they are driven to decide to engage themselves in a succession process.

2. **Exclusion of intrafamilial succession**

This is the first stage of the succession period. As elderly farmers usually envisage family members as possible successors of the farm, this stage can incorporate multiple attempts for intrafamilial farm transmission. If they have no children, nephews or nieces can also come into question as potential successors. However, even if there are family members available for taking over the farm, concrete co-working/co-farming may fail due to diverging expectations and notions of the actors.

3. **Considering extrafamilial farm succession**

If no (suitable) heir is available in the family, elderly farmers either decide to progressively reduce their farming activity, and sell or lease the farmland hectare-by-hectare, or to maintain the farm, and look for extrafamilial farm succession possibilities. Their health condition and the deterioration of the state of the farm may also enhance their willingness to accept a non-kin successor. If none of the potential family heirs decide to continue the family farm, clear decisions are to be taken regarding its future. The farmer and the heirs should agree on the financial and personal consequences of the final decision.

   In case elderly farmers decide to engage in extrafamilial farm succession, they might go through the four subsequent phases of the farm succession process (Phases 4, 5, 6, 7) multiple times, and by doing so, their movement may be circular, until finding the suitable successor. Depending on their expectations and preconceptions concerning successors, this period can take a longer or shorter time. Passing through the upcoming four phases more times can result in more realistic expectations.

4. **Collecting information**

When collecting information about possibilities, and about the financial, legal and personal challenges, requirements and consequences of extrafamilial farm succession, transferors tend to consider different sources. Friends, relatives, the agricultural chamber, state or private advisors might be of help with providing them with recommendations and suggestions regarding the succession process. Several national institutions and civil society organisations have developed advisory materials including methodologies and useful
tools. Other farmers involved in extrafamilial farm succession can share their good and bad experiences regarding the transmission process. Information collected during this stage can be of vital importance in selecting a non-kin successor.

5. Collecting contacts to non-kin successors

At this phase, transferors start looking for an appropriate non-kin person/couple to take over the farm. By seeking through different channels, advertisements in newspapers or following the advice of relatives, friends or neighbours, they collect contacts to interested, aspiring farmers. Often, a first telephone call can serve as a filter. The significance of the personal and social factors should, therefore, be considered from the beginning. In case of negative decision, searching and collecting information (Phase 4 and 5) goes on.

6. “Interviewing” potential successors

If the first exchange, often via telephone, looked promising, transferors invite the potential successor(s) for a visit. A personal meeting at the farm obviously allows a detailed discussion between the actors. It can serve as a good opportunity to share and clarify several issues regarding the future of the farm, even to make preliminary agreements concerning its operation. If the actors’ expectations are incompatible, transferors can return to the previous phases (4, 5). If transferors select an applicant as their successor, the probation period can start. As interviews revealed, transferors are more likely to choose a young person/couple who was recommended by relatives of friends. Socialisation in a farming family, agricultural education and working experiences also appeared as positively influencing elements.

7. Probation period: teaching and testing the successors

This phase of the succession process incorporates attempts to co-operate and to share living spaces with the successor. If transferors are still actively involved in farming, this stage enables them to get familiar with the successor. Sharing tasks and activities with the newcomer can reveal the real practical capabilities, the managing capacities and the reliability of the future successor. Transferors present the aspiring farmer working practices which they have been applying. This stage seems to be decisive in terms of better understanding the potentials of intergenerational farming cooperation. If the collaboration looks promising, a succession contract can be signed (see under the interconnected process later). If not, circular activity (Phases 4, 5, 6, 7) may go on until an appropriate successor is selected.

8. Shared life, joint operation of the farm

When oral and written agreements have been concluded, not only work but also everyday life in its total complexity is shared with the successor. During the joint operation, while transmitting the locally adapted agricultural knowledge and practices applied for generations, transferors can also benefit from intergenerational learning, from innovations applied by the successor.
9. Reduced influence in management, transformed activity

After the period of shared farm management with the younger generation the transferors, due to their reduced physical capacities, tend to step back from the main farming activities and reduce their involvement in the management of the business. Instead, they can perform smaller tasks around the farm (such as tending the garden) or new roles in the multigenerational partnership (taking care of the children of the successor couple while they work). Active work can contribute to their good health and longevity (Thelin and Holmberg 2010). They can also avoid social isolation (Salamon and Lockhart 1980; Hernandez-Peck 2001; Kolland 2008), and remain part of their rural community.

10. Withdrawal on the farm

Due to the strong interconnection between farming, family and life on small family farms, transferors frequently work until the end (“dying with the boots on”, Kirkpatrick 2013). In several cases, however, their physical or mental condition does not allow them to remain involved in farming activities. Withdrawing from the management with their mental and physical capacity decreasing, they can follow up the fate of their farm representing their “lifetime’s work (Lebenswerk)” (Korzenszky, Küßmann, and Maaß 2013). This way, they can avoid an intensive retirement shock (Rossier 2012). This multigenerational constellation enables them to live further in their house, within the new familiar context, and to die in their well-known environment, on the farm. Research results suggest that, despite the lack of an intrafamilial successor, the multigenerational partnership developed through the extrafamilial farm succession, offers transferors an alternative strategy to fulfil their expectations.

Extrafamilial farm succession from the perspective of the successor generations

The farm succession trajectory from the aspect the younger generation – the successors – (showed in the second analytic model, Figure 2) also contains 10 phases, each one requiring strategic decisions as preconditions of the way forward. These phases in some cases coincide, but in others differ in various important ways from those of the transferors, as can be seen from the brief descriptions below.

Figure 1. Extrafamilial farm succession from the perspective of the transferor generation.
1. Farming background (A) vs. Non-farming background (B)

In terms of personal background, two different points of origin can be identified from which young, aspiring farmers/farming couples enter into the succession process. The future successor can come from a farming family (1.A), where another brother/sister is the intrafamilial farm successor, or conflicts within the family hinder cooperation. As another possibility, future successors without any farming roots (1.B), can also be interested in enter into agriculture. According to the existing literature, there is an increasing number of young people with other occupational backgrounds who are interested to settle down on small farms in the countryside (EIP-AGRI Focus Group 2016). In such cases, motivations driving youth to engage into the succession process can be growing interest in and awareness of local, healthy food, the increasing interest of being self-sufficient and starting a new life that is connected to nature.

2. Know-how from the family (A) vs. Agricultural education (B)

Those with agricultural family backgrounds might acquire their farming knowledge and practical farming experience by working on the family farm (2.A). However, it is to be noted, that agricultural socialisation in farming families is not always the case, as some children never get involved in agricultural activities around the house. Potential successors without farming know-how from the family (2.B) usually enter different levels of agricultural education and join agricultural businesses to acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. If young aspiring farmers, indeed, decide to enter into agriculture by cultivating their own farm, they then consider possible solutions (farm succession, renting or buying a farm) with respect to their financial capital and sources.

3. Considering extrafamilial farm succession

Possible solutions of possessing a farm can be buying or leasing land, joining a farming community (Monllor 2012; EIP-AGRI Focus Group 2016), or taking over a farm from a non-kin farmer. Extrafamilial farm succession allows young aspiring farmers to engage in farming without considerable start-up capital. In the twin process, young farmers decide to engage in extrafamilial farm succession, they might go through the four subsequent phases of the farm succession process (Phases 4, 5, 6, 7) multiple times, until finding the suitable transferor. This period can result in more realistic expectations concerning available farms, and can provide a successful mode of communication with elderly farmers.

4. Collecting information

Potential successors start gathering information about the possibility and about the financial, legal and personal challenges, requirements and consequences of extrafamilial farm succession (see Phase 4 in Model 1). Farmers, involved in extrafamilial farm succession can also share their experiences regarding the process.
5. **Collecting contacts to transferors**

Potential successors start searching for available farms and potential transferors via different channels (verbal information, newspapers, advertisements, internet). During this period, they can concretise their expectations and fit their image of farming business to reality.

6. **“Interview” at the farm**

If available information about the farm and the first exchange looked promising, the potential successor checks the conditions and meets the transferor. A personal meeting at the farm allows a detailed discussion between the actors. During the conversation with the possible transferor, the personality of the elderly farmer may play a crucial role for the potential successors. Discussions during the farm visit may bring up elements which might have never been considered by the aspiring farmers.

7. **Probation period: learning, assisting and testing**

During this phase, real co-operation with the transferor along attempts to share living spaces can start. Potential successors might assist transferors in order to observe and learn about their farming techniques and managing practices. For potential successors, this phase is crucial from the point of view of their final decision for the farm.

8. **Shared life, joint operation of the farm**

Once the contract (see Model 3) is signed, joint farm operation can start. Successors, simultaneously, share their everyday life (meals, celebrations and similar) with the elderly farmer. In this sense, the non-kin successor entering into the process necessarily substitutes a kin successor for the transferor, while the transferor can integrate the newcomer into the local community.

Aspiring farmers entering into farming bring a number of resources – skills, networks, and financial capital, marketing and management practices – gained outside of farming, potentially allowing innovation in farming. This knowledge, however, requires adaptation to and consolidation with the local environmental and socioeconomic conditions. Conflicts emerging here are to be managed. New initiatives can only be successful, if they are well adjusted and carefully matched with the specific local settings and experience the transferor is aware of. Provided land, equipment, infrastructure, and the possibility of intergenerational learning, new successors are given the opportunity to generate their income while testing their novel ideas in a protected environment. This phase, therefore, serves as a kind of incubator (Winther 2013).

To maintain the reproduction and increase their living standard, successors – usually one of the farming couple – can maintain their previous, usually non-agricultural activities (“pluriactivity”) or develop multiple activities connected to farming (“multifunctionality”) (van der Ploeg 2010).
9. *Increased influence in management*

Farm successors progressively take the managerial control in their hands and increase their responsibilities and decision-making authority on the farm. Along their growing competence they often (re-)shape the farm and its production model according to their initiatives. Exploiting the given (tangible and intangible) farming assets and resources brought from outside, successors can successfully transform and improve the operation of the farm.

10. *Managing the (family) farm*

If the transferors’ physical or mental conditions do not allow them to remain involved in farm work, successors become the only actors taking decisions on farm management. While operating the farm, successors provide monetary and non-monetary assistance for the old transferors as agreed in the contract (see under Model 3).

**Interconnection of the generation-specific extrafamilial farm succession processes**

Interconnections within the multigenerational process can be exposed by interlacing the two generation-specific models, as shown in Figure 3. The resulting, complex qualitative model shows how generations’ pathways along the farm succession process can meet, interlace, unite and in the end, be divided.

The pathways of the young and the elderly farmers may intertwine for the first time while making contacts (Phase 5), with transferors seeking successors, and aspiring young farmers searching for available farms. Evidence, however, shows that the elderly and the young farmers using different channels of advertising and searching (verbal information, newspapers advertisements, internet), can create serious obstacles to finding each other. The elderly prefer printed newspapers, the young prefer the internet, so they may miss each other.

The first act of communication (letter or telephone call) outlining their aims and expectations, may serve as a filter, a decisive act favouring or excluding continuation. In case of negative decision, actors must keep on collecting contacts (Phase 5) and information (Phase 4). In case of positive decision, a personal encounter can take place (Phase 6).

![Figure 2. Extrafamilial farm succession from the perspective of the transferor generation.](image-url)
This “interview” between the actors may provide a better understanding of each other’s expectations and possibilities. In case of incompatible expectations, both actors return to the phase of searching (Phase 5). If transferors select an applicant as their successor, and the applicant considers conditions promising and finds the farm and the transferor appropriate, probation period (Phase 7) incorporating attempts by the actors to cooperate and to share living spaces can start. If the cooperation does not look promising, circular activity (Phases 4, 5, 6, 7) can go on.

This possibly circular movement while selecting and finding the appropriate partners (Phases 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) necessarily involves uncertainty and emotional stress for both actors until reaching the final decision and signing the contract.

If the probation turns out to be promising, a succession contract specifying obligations of the actors towards each other, including monetary and non-monetary assistance, can be signed. The length of the period forms the first encounter to the subscribing of the contract varied between one month and eight years in the research cases analysed. The most often applied contract form among the farmers interviewed, was the so-called life annuity (Leibrente) contract, the classic and most popular form of extrafamilial farm succession in Austria (Heistinger and Klein 2011). The life annuity contract between two parties is defined in the Austrian Civil Code, under paragraphs number 1284, 1285 and 1286 (Bundeskanzleramt der Republik Österreich 2017). Immovable or movable property is passed on to the successor for a certain amount of money, or monetary estimated objects/properties (food), to be pursued regularly and non-monetary assistance (for example, access to medical care) to be provided to the end of the transferor’s life. The amount of the annuity is set individually between the actors.

Once the oral and written arrangements are concluded, substantial cooperative work (Phase 8) can start. Research shows that the newly established multigenerational non-family farming community, having control over the main resources, provides the majority of the labour force on the farm. Given its multigenerational features, this non-family farming community can, similarly to natural families, operate successfully, if actors can mutually benefit from the harmonised in- and outflow of generation-specific knowledge (Neumeier 2011), with the transferor accepting initiatives by the successor and the
successor provided by the transferor with living space, land, equipment, infrastructure and locally adapted agricultural knowledge and practices applied for generations, helping to adapt their expectations and initiatives to local environmental, socioeconomic and cultural conditions. During the intergenerational collaboration conflicts can evidently emerge, too:

… It wasn’t obvious that it would be so difficult with the woman. At the first visit she looked so nice, open-minded, and intelligent, interested, also open to modern things, but yes … when you live together, it’s a bit different and conflicts can arise. Perhaps she imagined things otherwise, right? I don’t know how exactly, but … I don’t know. She won’t tell me … (Successor #6)

The farm, however, is not only a place of agricultural production (van der Ploeg 2013). At Phase 8, not only farm operation but also everyday life in its total complexity is shared. With the new generation, potentially a family with children, settling on the farm, the residential situation at the farm house may be reorganised, and daily meals may be shared or taken separately.

… I kept my apartment, so they [successor] had to move in upstairs. It was partly redone but there was no flooring and heating … In the beginning, they slept in my living room, we cooked and ate together. Yes, we still have breakfast and dinner in the evening here, but we have lunch upstairs. She said, once she has a new kitchen, she wants to cook upstairs … (Transferor #4)

Celebrations and participation at family events are to be organised with care. The mutually provided assistance requires continuous re-adjustments according to the life-stage, and the physical and mental conditions of the transferor and the successor.

The intergenerational relation between the old transferors and the young successors can develop progressively from a hierarchical, “supervisor”–“student” relation (Phase 7) through the equal relation of “co-managers” (Phase 8) to the final, “helper”–“new manager” relation (Phase 9) with the successor becoming the manager and the transferor becoming a helper at the farm until withdrawing from work. As suggested by the dance metaphor by Handler, the process is similar to connected dance moves: until the former operator has moved from one stage to the next, the successor cannot move forward (Handler 1994, 136).

… Yes, I get up early in the morning and help them [successor] a bit at the stable, and in the evening, too, and I also join them at the forest, and also here outside, with ensiling or so I help them. Also because they are not quite versed in handling the machines. It was my will to continue working … (Transferor #4)

In the core of the procedure, there is the transfer of leadership, decision-making authority and experiences. Extrafamilial farm succession, therefore, appears to involve a mutual role adjustment process (Handler 1989) between the actors. To enable the succession, the transferor slowly moves out from his/her previous role, and the successor progressively takes over his/her position. In a successful extrafamilial farm succession process, actors continually re-adjust their relation to each other and to the farm: the transferor is gradually disengaged form farming with the successor taking over the management.

Often, only one of the new farming couple gets involved in farming, while the other maintains his/her non-agricultural occupation (pluriactivity). Combining different income sources contributes to the increased stability of the farming business. “So, my
wife works at the office of the warehouse. It functions very well. She works only 15 hours, otherwise, she is at home, where we have also opened a gardening and landscaping shop …” (successor #5).

New strategies for income diversification are offered by the development of multiple activities “within the farm gate” (Loughrey et al. 2013) (multifunctionality), by diversifying agricultural production or by developing further activities connected to farming (agrotourism, recreation/sports activities, handicrafts, production of renewable energy, on-farm food processing). As one of the interviewed successors explained, “and by undertaking horse farming and building, we could extend a bit, so we could gain a certain level of autonomy from them, as we have a second pillar now. We have started on-farm tourism too. They complement each other because now people can be accommodated after trail riding” (successor #10).

New activities include the introduction of new marketing strategies:

… we take the horses to the farmers’ market once a month … We benefit from selling the products and also from that people know that, yes, W. [successor] is coming with the horses, and it is a great attraction not only for the children but for all. The old take photos with the horses as it is … it is something special … (Successor #5)

Marketing through short food supply chains not only enables smallholders to obtain better income for their products, but can also facilitate the development of better linkages within the local community (see also McGreevy, Kobayashi, and Tanaka 2019, this issue, on the community’s role).

**Contributions of extrafamilial farm succession to the “renewal of peasantries”**

Although insufficiently recognised so far, the extrafamilial farm succession mechanism offers an additional, prospective strategy to maintain smallholder farms and small-scale food production, resisting the direct dependency on financial capital and the concentration of corporate power in the food system.

Patterns of farm transfer from the retiring to the new farmer generation have significant implications for the future structure of agricultural and rural development (Errington 2002), particularly the reproduction of smallholder farming in late capitalism (Cassidy, Srinivasan, and White 2019). Extrafamilial farm succession generating a multigenerational non-familial agrarian partnership is a complex, multi-layered transfer mechanism that can offer local solutions to global problems in many ways. It can bring together elderly farmers without kin heirs, and young aspiring farmers, who would otherwise have no access to land. Land, as a crucial component of “peasant identity” (van der Ploeg and Ye 2016), is of strategic importance in the transmission process for both generations concerned. While transferors interviewed are concerned in the survival of their farm, – “Someone should follow you on the farm to cultivate it! Cultivate! Good will alone is not enough” (transferor #7) – successors also stress the importance of maintaining smallholder farms, “We also want to show that small farms are still viable” (successor #5).

The active cooperation of the generations during work and beyond, can create important linkages between past, present and future (van der Ploeg 2013). The multigenerational constellation provides home, protection and care for the ageing farmers at their own living
space – in a family setting if offered by the successor’s family. As a transferor outlines his expectations in an interview:

… family contact, perhaps. So that they can somehow take care of me, or that if I’m really sick, I don’t have to go to a retirement home, if I grow old and weak, right? … My home is here! This is my wish … a loving family, sharing meals, tea in the morning, you could communicate with, and with whom you are on the same wavelength … (Transferor #3)

The young farmers and their families, on the other hand, can benefit from the farm providing them with home, income and the realisation of their desire to settle down in the countryside and enter agriculture.

By bringing new living labour into the sector of small-scale food production, extrafamilial farm succession can counter the tendency of “deactivation”, the decline of smallholder agricultural activities.

Furthermore, by providing these young, aspiring farmers with the opportunity to enter smallholder farming while protecting the ageing farming generation, extrafamilial farm succession facilitates a generational turnover, and thus a better-balanced share of farmers across age cohorts. It offers a potential to reverse the increasing age disequilibrium in agriculture.

Extrafamilial farm succession enables young aspiring farmers to enter in agriculture at their own farm without considerable start-up capital, to find their new home and to have access to land and to all the tangible and intangible assets of farming. As a young aspiring farmer said, “Extrafamilial farm succession … has many advantages … if you just don’t have enough money to buy a farm, there is a different solution” (successor #2). Reconstructions, changes or necessary investments on the farm can be implemented in a progressive manner. Existing structures can serve as a good basis for further development and innovations. The farm provides a possibility for the successors, to learn and practise farming in a potentially protected constellation, under the supervision of the transferor.

As seen above, the harmonised in- and outflow of generation-specific knowledge (Neumeier 2011) provided by the multigenerational constellation provides an excellent possibility to interconnect, match and, combine the traditional knowledge with new modern ideas and practices. Along the interlacing phases of the extrafamilial farm succession process (Phases 7, 8, 9), a continuous, collaborative action is undertaken by the two farmers’ generations, to optimise and improve the farm’s settings. “Yes, at the beginning, we had to get tuned to each other, let’s put it that way. There was a transitional phase [of about 4 months], and since then we have been working together, we have always been there together all four of us [in the stall]” (successor #8).

Young aspiring farmers, entering into farming, bring a number of resources gained outside of farming – skills, networks, and financial capital, marketing and management practices – allowing innovation into the farming sector (EIP-AGRI Focus Group 2016). This knowledge, however, requires adaptation to and consolidation with the experience accumulated and the knowledge transferred by the elderly farmers and with the local environmental and socioeconomic conditions.

The knowledge that elderly farmers have collected from their ancestors, in some cases for centuries, is an invaluable heritage of peasantry. It holds vital elements for the future of world agriculture, therefore the intergenerational succession of these intangible “capitals” of farming is of vital importance (Ferrante et al. 2015, 76). The knowledge concerning
location-specific crops, soil, animals, weather conditions and the best tools and best courses of action learned and “meticulously fine-tuned” (van der Ploeg 2010, 13) throughout their lifetime, and the historically accumulated resources (Bohler and Hildebrand 1997), are indispensable for running the transferred farm successfully (Eco Ruralis 2016) and sustainably. Successors interviewed are aware of the significance of land as “ecological capital” (van der Ploeg 2010, 2) and the importance of food production practised in dynamic “co-production” (ibid.) between human actors and nature. “It is important that you live with nature, not against it. We work with agriculture and with nature. This is our basic principle” (successor #9). The maintenance of agricultural diversity helps ensure sustainable food production.

Continuously reproducing their ecological capital, reducing their monetary linkages to the mainstream market and developing distance from commodity relations, successors can attain “self-provisioning” (van der Ploeg 2010, 7), another central feature of peasant farming, and maintain their autonomy. “The more independent we are, the better” (successor #2) a successor claimed.

To increase the reproduction circuit, successors, as seen above, often maintain their previous, usually non-farming related activities/pluriactivity or “new rurality” (Kay 2008), or develop multiple activities (multifunctionality). Diversified management strategies, introduced by the successors, have high potentials to reduce their monetary linkages to the mainstream market and strengthen and increase connections to the territorial agro-food system and to the local community.

Consciously resisting the globalised food production and distribution system, by sustaining independent resource-based food production, small-scale farms, maintained by the extrafamilial farm succession mechanism, are able to face challenges of international crises caused by the interaction of the industrialisation of agriculture, the liberalisation of markets and the rise of food empires, and may strongly contribute to food security and food sovereignty.

**Conclusions**

By reconstructing multigenerational farming communities, the extrafamilial farm transmission process provides a useful tool for the maintenance of the continuity of peasant farms. This alternative farm succession mechanism can be applied as an adaptive transfer strategy contributing to the survival and regeneration of peasant society and effectively and sustainably improving food security and food sovereignty.

Future research might examine the relevance and adaptability of this prospective mechanism under different economic, social and political conditions also considering the legal and economic aspects in force in the defined area. By adapting the above presented analytical model to the context of a specific territory, it could be further specified and further developed also through repeated observations, through longitudinal in-depth studies of single and multiple extrafamilial farm succession cases.

**Notes**

1. Preliminary results of the research have been presented as a working paper at the international colloquium *Elikadura. The Future of Food and Challenges for Agriculture in the*
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