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INSTITUTIONAL
CHANGE IN
AGRICULTURE AND
NATURAL RESOURCES

Melf-Hinrich Ehlers

Fermented Dreams
Regional Entrepreneurship and
Institutional Dynamics of Germany's
Agricultural Biogas Sector

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Fermented Dreams

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Institutioneller Wandel der Landwirtschaft und Ressourcennutzung

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Melf-Hinrich Ehlers

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Aim and Scope of the Series

„Nothing endures but change“. Heraclitus the Ephesian (ca. 535–475 BC)

Institutions, defined as “the rules of the game”, are a key factor to the sustainable development of societies. They structure not only the multitude of human-human interactions of modern societies, but also most of the human-nature interactions. Poverty, famine, civil war, degradation of natural resources and even the collapse of ecosystems and societies often have institutional causes, likewise social and economic prosperity, sustainable use of resources and the resilience of socio-ecological systems. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries are those human activities where the interdependencies between human-human and human-nature interactions are perhaps most pronounced, and diverse institutions have been developed in history to govern them.

Social and ecological conditions are, however, ever changing, which continuously challenge the existing institutional structure at a given point in time. Those changes may be long-term, like population growth or climate change, medium-term, such as new technologies or changing price relations, or short-term, like floods or bankruptcies, but all of them pose the question whether the rules of the game need to be adapted. Failures to adapt timely and effectively may come at a high social cost. Institutional change, however, face a principal dilemma: on the one hand, institutions need to be stable to structure expectations and effectively influence human behaviors; on the other hand, they need to be adaptive to respond to the ever changing circumstance mentioned above. Understanding stability and change as well as developing adaptive institutions and effective, efficient and fair mechanisms of change are, therefore, of central importance for societies and an ongoing research challenge for social scientists.

If we want to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adaptability of institutions, it stands to reason that we have to develop a good understanding of the causes, effects, processes and mechanism of stability and change. This is the aim of the series “Institutional Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources,” which attempts to answer the questions “How do processes and mechanism of institutional change actually work? What and who are the main determinants and actors driving, governing and influencing these processes? What are the economic, political, social and ecological consequences? How can adaptive institutions be designed and developed, and what governance structures are required to make them effective?” These are the questions at the heart of the series. The works published in this series seek to provide answers to these questions in different economic, social, political and historical contexts.

Volker Beckmann and Konrad Hagedorn

Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald und Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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Biel, October 2018

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Brief table of contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Brief table of contents	ix
Contents	xi
List of figures.....	xxiii
List of tables.....	xxv
Abbreviations	xxvii
Prologue	xxix
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Literature review	13
3 Analytical framework.....	55
4 Empirical methods.....	85
5 Presentation of findings.....	125
6 Initiation of biogas plans	127
7 Planning technology and feedstock	165
8 Planning consent and environmental governance	215
9 Economic planning	299
10 Conclusion	405
References	427
List of legislation.....	467
Appendices	471

Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Brief table of contents	ix
Contents	xi
List of figures.....	xxiii
List of tables.....	xxv
Abbreviations	xxvii
Prologue	xxix
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to topic	1
1.2 Research gap and problem	4
1.2.1 Primary research questions	5
1.2.2 Significance of the study.....	5
1.3 Sketch of analytical framework	7
1.4 Summary of methods and data sources.....	8
1.5 Assumptions, limitations and scope.....	8
1.6 Explanation of key terms	10
1.7 Outline of structure	10
2 Literature review	13
2.1 Forces shaping agricultural biogas sectors	14
2.1.1 Biogas potentials	14
2.1.2 Economics of biogas	15
2.1.2.1 Financial viability of biogas plants.....	15
2.1.2.2 Investment appraisal models	16
2.1.2.3 Viability of co-digestion.....	17
2.1.2.4 Viability of energy crops	17

2.1.2.5	Role of digestate for viability of biogas plants.....	18
2.1.2.6	Economies of scale	18
2.1.2.7	Financial risks.....	19
2.1.2.8	Empirical research on financial viability.....	21
2.1.2.9	Economic models of biogas plants	21
2.1.2.10	Economic land use models	22
2.1.2.11	Sectoral economics of biogas production.....	23
2.1.2.12	Effects on land prices	23
2.1.2.13	Effects on competitiveness and farming structures	24
2.1.2.14	Effects of financial support measures.....	25
2.1.2.15	Economics of adoption decisions	28
2.1.2.16	Summary of economic forces.....	29
2.1.3	Environmental impacts	30
2.1.3.1	Greenhouse gas emissions.....	30
2.1.3.2	Greenhouse gas emissions in context to other emissions.....	30
2.1.3.3	Environmental impact of energy cropping for biogas.....	31
2.1.3.4	Impacts on soil and water.....	32
2.1.3.5	Summary of environmental impacts.....	33
2.1.4	Regulation and governance.....	33
2.1.4.1	Contracting for energy crops and land	34
2.1.4.2	Organisation and finance of biogas plants.....	34
2.1.4.3	Planning regulation.....	35
2.1.4.4	Waste and fertiliser regulation.....	36
2.1.4.5	Planning practice	36
2.1.4.6	Siting and stakeholder concerns	37
2.1.4.7	Regulatory measures	38
2.1.4.8	Summary of regulation.....	39
2.1.5	Wider social and economic dynamics.....	40
2.1.5.1	Studies on social and economic dynamics	40
2.1.5.2	Emergence of biogas sectors from learning perspectives.....	41

2.1.5.3	Innovation systems perspectives	42
2.1.5.4	Strategic niche management	44
2.1.5.5	Regional-level development	45
2.1.5.6	Analysis of discourses	45
2.1.5.7	Related empirical observations	45
2.1.5.8	Summary of wider social and economic dynamics	46
2.2	Methods, evidence and theory	46
2.2.1	Predictive models	47
2.2.2	Generation and use of quantitative data	47
2.2.3	Evaluation of wider economic effects of biogas generation	48
2.2.4	Empirical analysis of decision-making	48
2.2.5	Case study approaches	49
2.2.6	Availability and use of time series	49
2.2.7	Data on environmental impacts	50
2.2.8	Summary of methods, evidence and theory	50
2.3	Conclusion of literature review	51
3	Analytical framework.....	55
3.1	Basic framework	55
3.2	Transactions	58
3.2.1	Biogeophysical attributes of transactions	58
3.2.2	Social attributes of transactions	59
3.2.3	Sets of transactions	60
3.2.4	Transactions and social relations	61
3.2.5	Effort of transacting	63
3.3	Actors	64
3.3.1	Rational actors	65
3.3.2	Accounting for anomalies to rationality	65
3.3.3	Entrepreneurship, uncertainty and novelty	66
3.3.3.1	Types and traits of entrepreneurship	66
3.3.3.2	Reasons for entrepreneurial activity	67

3.3.3.3	Dynamics of entrepreneurship.....	68
3.3.3.4	Entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial actors	69
3.3.3.5	Creativity and agency	69
3.4	Institutions and governance	71
3.4.1	Relations among and within institutions.....	72
3.4.2	Contents of institutions	72
3.4.3	Property rights.....	74
3.4.4	Governance	76
3.5	Change	78
3.5.1	Technological change and innovation	78
3.5.2	Institutional change and entrepreneurship	80
3.6	Conclusion of analytical framework.....	82
4	Empirical methods.....	85
4.1	Case study method	85
4.1.1	The research problem and the case study	85
4.1.1.1	Case selection approaches	86
4.1.1.2	Defining the case	87
4.1.2	Analytical framework and case.....	87
4.1.2.1	Thick, thin and open frameworks.....	87
4.1.2.2	The framework for this case study	88
4.1.3	Case boundaries	89
4.1.4	Case selection.....	90
4.1.5	Case data	91
4.2	Approaches to data generation and analysis	92
4.2.1	Scope of the research	92
4.2.1.1	Scope and ontology	93
4.2.1.2	Scope and epistemology	94
4.2.2	Mode of inference.....	94
4.2.3	Approaches to ensure empirical research quality	95
4.2.3.1	Validity	95

4.2.3.2	Reliability	96
4.2.3.3	Quality criteria	96
4.3	Data generation and preparation steps	98
4.3.1	Initial expert interviews	98
4.3.2	Sampling strategy.....	99
4.3.2.1	Sampling of interview participants.....	99
4.3.2.2	Accessing interview participants	106
4.3.2.3	Access to documents	107
4.3.3	Data generation with qualitative interviews	107
4.3.3.1	Interview design	107
4.3.3.2	Practical considerations for interviewing	108
4.3.3.3	Interview guides	108
4.3.3.4	Conduct of interviews.....	110
4.3.3.5	Interviews with groups of participants	111
4.3.3.6	Dynamics during the interviews	112
4.3.4	Informed consent to interview	113
4.3.5	Data preparation.....	113
4.3.5.1	Transcription of interview recordings	113
4.3.5.2	Situating the interviews	114
4.3.6	Further data sources	114
4.3.6.1	Data from farming magazines	115
4.3.6.2	Statistical time series	117
4.4	Qualitative analysis.....	118
4.4.1	Coding.....	118
4.4.1.1	First cycle coding of interview transcripts	118
4.4.1.2	Memo writing	119
4.4.1.3	Coding practice.....	121
4.4.1.4	Intermediate and second cycle coding.....	123
4.5	Integration of interview, farming magazines and statistical data	124
5	Presentation of findings.....	125

6	Initiation of biogas plans.....	127
6.1	Analytical steps.....	127
6.2	Initiation of first plans.....	128
6.2.1	Initiation before 1991.....	130
6.2.2	Initiation starting between 1991 and 2000.....	133
6.2.3	Initiation starting in 2000.....	138
6.2.4	Initiation starting between 2001 and 2004.....	140
6.2.5	Initiation starting after 2004.....	144
6.3	Initiation of expansion	150
6.3.1	Expansion of cropping for biogas.....	151
6.3.2	Expansion of heat utilisation.....	152
6.3.3	Expansion of biogas plants	155
6.4	Implications.....	157
6.4.1	Innovation dynamics.....	159
6.4.2	Adoption research	160
6.4.3	Entrepreneurship and institutional change.....	162
7	Planning technology and feedstock.....	165
7.1	Models of technological planning.....	166
7.1.1	The self-built model.....	167
7.1.2	The compilation model	168
7.1.3	The product model	170
7.1.4	The compilation model versus the product model.....	173
7.2	Technology providers and technological advice	174
7.2.1	Direct transactions with technology providers	174
7.2.2	Advice on technology providers	175
7.3	Technological planning advice	178
7.3.1	Advice on technological novelties	179
7.3.2	Official advice.....	180
7.3.3	Advice through associations	181
7.3.4	Commercial advice	183

7.3.5	Complementary sources of advice	192
7.3.6	Technological planning during construction	194
7.3.7	Advice for self-built plants	195
7.3.8	Change in advice and technology	196
7.4	Planning labour and technology.....	198
7.5	Technological planning of feedstock	200
7.5.1	Liquid and solid manure	201
7.5.2	Residues	202
7.5.3	Digestion of energy crops	204
7.5.4	Sole digestion of energy crops.....	209
7.6	Technological planning according to feedstock or vice versa?	209
7.6.1	Feedstock-driven technology	209
7.6.2	Technology-driven feedstock.....	210
7.6.3	Standardised technological plans	211
7.7	Implications of feedstock and technological planning.....	212
8	Planning consent and environmental governance	215
8.1	Formal procedures and rules	216
8.2	Preparation of planning application	217
8.2.1	Applications through external investors	218
8.2.2	Applications for self-built plants	219
8.2.3	Preparation of an application with advisors.....	219
8.2.4	Accounting for regulation in an application	221
8.2.5	Transacting with authorities.....	222
8.2.6	Differences between regions and authorities	225
8.2.7	Transactions among advisors.....	225
8.2.8	Change of planning applications.....	226
8.3	Transactions within and among authorities	228
8.3.1	Working in authorities	228
8.3.2	Additional activities of authorities	229
8.4	Granting planning consent	230

8.4.1	Consenting time	231
8.4.2	Coordination of concerns	232
8.4.3	Interpretation	233
8.4.4	Consenting transactions with applicants	236
8.4.5	Technological guidance	237
8.4.6	Discretion	238
8.5	Regulation of specific planning concerns	240
8.5.1	Land use and development planning	240
8.5.2	Privileged development and BImSchG consents	241
8.5.3	Local concerns	245
8.5.4	Cultural artefacts	247
8.5.5	Habitat, species and landscape protection	248
8.5.6	Gas handling	252
8.5.7	Noise	254
8.5.8	Odour	255
8.5.9	Exhaust emissions	255
8.5.10	Water protection	256
8.5.11	Digestate handling	260
8.5.12	Consent for grids	261
8.5.13	Objection to consent	261
8.5.14	Consent and construction	262
8.5.15	Change of consenting	262
8.6	Regulation during construction and operation	264
8.6.1	Final examination	265
8.6.2	Additional requirements after consent	267
8.6.3	Monitoring during operation	268
8.7	Other regulation	272
8.7.1	Co-digestion of external waste	272
8.7.2	Use of energy crops	272
8.7.3	Roads	274

8.8	Changing regulation.....	274
8.9	Unregulated issues of concern	276
8.10	Voluntary arrangements.....	278
8.10.1	Land use contracts.....	279
8.10.2	Arrangements with local residents.....	280
8.10.3	Farming practices.....	283
8.10.4	Changing conventions.....	284
8.11	Implications of regulation.....	284
8.11.1	Standardised technology	285
8.11.2	Planning expertise.....	285
8.11.3	Governance by authorities	287
8.11.4	Monitoring and enforcement.....	290
8.11.5	Changing governance.....	291
8.11.6	Governance of specific transactions	292
8.11.7	Key aspects of regulation.....	297
9	Economic planning	299
9.1	Project appraisal.....	301
9.1.1	Limited financial viability in early stages.....	301
9.1.2	Promises of appraisals.....	302
9.1.3	Failing expectations	304
9.1.4	Appraisal approaches and experiences	306
9.1.5	Emergence of financial advisors.....	307
9.1.6	Performing financial appraisals	310
9.2	Electricity feed-in transactions	312
9.2.1	Regulatory and acceptance issues.....	314
9.2.2	Grid access and sales transactions	316
9.3	Heat transactions	318
9.3.1	Regulation of the CHP premium.....	319
9.3.2	Heat utilisation investments.....	320
9.4	Feedstock transactions	323

9.4.1	Co-digestion of externally sourced organic waste	323
9.4.2	Feedstock under the 2004 feed-in regulation.....	324
9.4.3	Securing energy crops.....	325
9.4.4	Internal crop supply arrangements.....	331
9.4.5	Feedstock from set-aside land.....	332
9.4.6	The CAP energy crop premium	333
9.5	Digestate transactions	336
9.6	Technology transactions	337
9.6.1	Technology selection	337
9.6.2	Technology advice	339
9.6.3	Technological liability	342
9.6.4	Technology transactions with external investors	343
9.6.5	Critical technology costs.....	343
9.6.6	Consenting and construction issues	345
9.6.7	Changing technological performance	345
9.6.8	Technological learning.....	346
9.7	Labour transactions.....	348
9.8	Finance transactions.....	349
9.8.1	Company construction and liability	350
9.8.2	Reasons of banks to support biogas	351
9.8.3	Networking of banks.....	353
9.8.4	Banking competition.....	354
9.8.5	Identification of clients	355
9.8.6	Banking relations	356
9.8.7	Expertise of investors and operators	360
9.8.8	Expertise of banks.....	361
9.8.9	External advice for banks.....	363
9.8.10	Loan application assessment.....	364
9.8.11	Loan application procedures	365
9.8.12	Internal loan assessments and arrangements.....	367

9.8.13 Appraisals by banks	368
9.8.14 Working instructions in banks	369
9.8.15 Regulation and loans.....	371
9.8.16 Surety arrangements.....	372
9.8.17 Rejection of loans	375
9.8.18 Fixing the loan package	376
9.8.19 Post-contractual loan arrangements	377
9.8.20 Alternatives to loan-financing.....	379
9.8.21 Insurance	383
9.9 Investment support transactions.....	383
9.9.1 Grants.....	385
9.9.2 Subsidised interest	390
9.10 Change	391
9.11 Implications.....	393
9.11.1 Financial advice and appraisal.....	393
9.11.2 Electricity transactions.....	395
9.11.3 Feedstock transactions	396
9.11.4 Technology transactions	398
9.11.5 Financial investment transactions.....	399
9.11.6 Investment support.....	401
9.11.7 Transactions of minor relevance	402
10 Conclusion	405
10.1 Reflections on findings	406
10.1.1 Reasons for biogas engagements	407
10.1.2 Institutions and engagements.....	409
10.1.2.1 Property institutions.....	410
10.1.2.2 Technology institutions	411
10.1.2.3 Advisory institutions	411
10.1.2.4 Financial support	412
10.1.2.5 Labour institutions.....	414

10.1.2.6 Finance institutions.....	414
10.1.2.7 Planning and environmental institutions	415
10.1.3 Institutional change.....	417
10.1.4 Technology and biophysical resources	419
10.2 Scope and limitations	421
10.3 Implications for policy and practice	423
10.4 Further research	424
References	427
List of legislation	467
Appendices.....	471