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A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL INITIATIVES AIMED AT PRESERVING FARMLAND ON THE URBAN FRINGE

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Introduction

Farmland preservation is a longstanding challenge on the urban fringe. In the Mediterranean basin in particular, the preservation of periurban agricultural spaces is acknowledged as crucial to food security in a context of scarcity for agriculture.

Many local initiatives have been developed to protect farmland, ranging from loosely regulated micro-local farmland management to ambitious regional initiatives or national regulatory frameworks. However, it is always difficult to compare local initiatives because of the diversity of social and spatial contexts (land property regimes, social organization, institutions). The literature have warned especially against possible causal relationships between land use planning and land use change (Kline *et al.*, 2014). Many exogenous and endogenous factors influence farmland protection efficacy and land development patterns.

Our paper addresses this issue and compares case-studies of farmland protection initiatives, through a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) based on a multi-criteria framework. This comparative method identifies the similarities between cases that have been analysed and encoded qualitatively (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). We test it on 35 initiatives of farmland protection in the South of France. After having explained how we implemented the QCA method, the results section highlights the diversity of local initiatives and reveals some factors explaining their success (or failure). Finally, the results are discussed referring to methodological issues and to the insights gained on farmland protection initiatives.

Materials and Methods

QCA is a method adapted to identify facilitating conditions for the emergence of successful local initiatives of farmland protection. As opposed to regression analysis, which uses the variation in the independent variables to explain the variation in the dependent variable, QCA uses Boolean logic and set theory to find which combinations of characteristics (or conditions) are most closely associated with the outcome in question. QCA considers that the effects of individual conditions may depend on the presence or absence of other conditions, and that there may be multiple causal paths to the same outcome (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009).

Such a method is suited to the study of medium-n populations. For the purpose of this study, we identified 48 local initiatives of farmland protection in the South of France, through literature review, document analysis, Internet and 35 interviews (with 8 researchers, 10 municipalities, 6 inter-municipal bodies, 4 wine coops, 5 others). Each initiative was described through the same analytical framework, related to the objectives of the initiative, the stakeholders, the tools and the human and material resources involved, the governance and the results. From the 48 initiatives identified, 42 grids could be completed. And only 35 were integrated in the QCA process as the 7 left were very recent initiatives, for which it was difficult to assess the results.

This sample of 35 recent initiatives (started since 2000) includes innovative public land-use planning regulations, cases of farmland acquisition by local authorities, wine coops or

community land trust (*Terre de Liens*), innovative (public or private) groupings of farm buildings, and actions aimed at mobilizing owners of fallow land.

For the purpose of the QCA, each initiative was coded, specifying whether it meets 9 conditions¹ and whether it can be considered as successful. A positive outcome refers to initiatives that have limited or stopped urban scattering on the urban fringe. If the initiative is related to land management, it must also contribute to maintaining farming. If the initiative is related to farm buildings management, at least one construction must be under way or achieved. In our study, 26 out of 35 initiatives were considered as successful.

Results

First result, all the successful initiatives of our sample have involved significant financial resources, except one: a municipality supported the transfer of a farm to a young sheep-breeder without significant financial resources. More than 100 ha were found after direct solicitation by a municipal councilor of landowners of fallow land.

Second result, all the initiatives in which new farmers willing to start a business were involved from the beginning were successful in our sample. Then, all the initiatives in which a person was in charge of conducting the project with significant part of her/his time dedicated to it were successful, except one: a municipality wanted to transform the building of a former wine coop into a grouping of farm sheds and a multi-purpose hall for cultural activities. However it did not succeed because it did not find adequate funding. Human resources are thus essential but they were not sufficient in this case without financial resources.

Finally, we found that the high urban pressure on farmland was not always a barrier, as all initiatives located in municipalities close to major urban centers succeeded in our sample when the beneficiaries were exclusively grape growers.

Discussion and Conclusions

These results are of course strictly related to our sample. The coding relies on our subjective assessment of the conditions and the results, based on our qualitative knowledge of each initiative. Other results may be obtained by including more cases, especially more failed initiatives. Nevertheless, these results show the power of the QCA method to confirm or infirm intuitions, and to identify counter-factual cases, exceptions that need further attention.

Beyond human and financial resources, farmland management initiatives focusing on land rather than on farms/farmers dynamics appear to be less effective. Beyond financial and human resources, our results thus confirm the need to integrate farmers and the specific features of local agriculture from the beginning in order to achieve an effective farmland preservation.

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¹ The 9 conditions were : human resources, financial resources, high urban pressure on land, only grape growers among the beneficiaries, objective of increasing farming systems diversity, the involvement of more than one local authority, of new farmers, of professional farming organisations, of civil society representatives.