

Small Business Entrepreneurship in Post-Socialist Agriculture: Insights on Farmers in Bulgaria

Stela Valchovska

Abstract

This research is concerned with exploring differences in the meaning of entrepreneurial behaviour among owner-managers of agricultural enterprises in Bulgaria. It aims to gain a better understanding of the origin and development of small businesses in a post-socialist context. Entrepreneurial behaviour is understood as the start-up and development of a new business and is examined through the views and experiences of agricultural producers. An exploratory conceptual framework, encompassing the individual owner-manager, the enterprise and the family, is developed to guide the investigation. It facilitated an analysis of the entrepreneurial process and the relationship between agricultural producers and their enterprises, while also taking into account the possible influences of involved family members. Data were drawn from qualitative face-to-face interviews with a diverse sample of 83 agricultural producers in four rural settlements. The respondents represented different demographic characteristics and agricultural sub-sectors.

The findings from this exploratory research provide useful insights into the entrepreneurial behaviour of Bulgarian agricultural producers. Different patterns of engagement with the agricultural enterprises emerge. These are explained through start-up motivations and growth aspirations and achievement, which in turn are related to differences in the scale of enterprises. Furthermore, patterns of engagement are related to differences in orientation towards self-employment and adoption of the role of owner-manager. Start-up motivations are associated with a complex interaction of different factors. They are also strongly related to the post-socialist context as represented by macro-level changes. The interviewees recognised and reacted differently to these changes. Presence of involved family members could have either a positive or negative influence on the start-up of new additional

activities or the enlargement of existing ones. Contextual issues like the post-socialist background, culture and family contributed to a better understanding of the businesses and entrepreneurial behaviour. The results suggest that the entrepreneurial behaviour of post-socialist agricultural producers requires further research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of why they undertake their own business.

Key words: entrepreneurial behaviour; farmers; Bulgaria; small business entrepreneurs; post-socialist change