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Theme 2

A QUALITATIVE REASONED ACTION APPROACH TO EXPLORE FARMERS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS REGARDING BARRIERS TO LAND MOBILITY

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Introduction

Structural problems in the agricultural sector such as small and fragmented farmlands as well as an ageing farmer population are experienced by a number of European countries (Bika, 2007; CSO, 2012; European Commission, 2012, 2013; Mazorra, 2000). These issues are considered as barriers to more efficient and sustainable land use and are even more significant in times where global food security is under pressure from a growing world population and a rising number of extreme weather events. While an increase in average farm sizes generally would lead to a greater resource efficiency through economies of scale (J. Davis, Caskie, & Wallace, 2009), younger, well-educated farmers have been shown to adopt more recent, advanced technology and to be more open to environmentally friendly farming practices (Karali, Brunner, Doherty, Hersperger, & Rounsevell, 2014; Paudel, Mishra, & Segarra, 2012; Sanchez, Alvaro-Fuentes, Cunningham, & Iglesias, 2014; Slee, Gibbon, & Taylor, 2006; Vanslebrouck, Van Huylbroeck, & Verbeke, 2002). On the other hand past developments towards and large-scale agriculture have lead to negative social and environmental consequences (Belfrage, Bjoerklund, & Salomonsson, 2005; Goldschmidt, 1978; Lobao & Stofferahn, 2008).

In Ireland the government has outlined ambitious targets to grow the agri-food sector in its Food Harvest 2020 program. Achieving those targets within in the limits of environmental

sustainability will in part depend on overcoming the barriers to land mobility and supporting the younger generation entering farming. Land mobility in Ireland is particularly low in an international context (Ciaian, Kancs, & Swinnen, 2010). Irish farming is characterised by owner-occupied family farms, with land mobility usually taking place around the time of intra-generational farm transfer. In the past, the Irish Government has employed tax breaks and support schemes improving land mobility such as the Early Retirement Scheme and the Young Farmer Installation Scheme. However, up to now their success in increasing the level of land mobility in general and the transfer of land to the younger generation has been limited (Bika, 2007; John Davis, Caskie, & Wallace, 2013; Gillmor, 1999). The objective of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the various barriers to land mobility as perceived by Irish farmers, as well as Irish farmers' views on how to alleviate these barriers.

Literature Review

A number of studies have been conducted researching barriers to land mobility occurring during the processes of succession and retirement. They investigated economic and socio-demographic as well as behavioural factors such as values, attitudes and identity. Figure 1 gives an overview of the factors having identified.

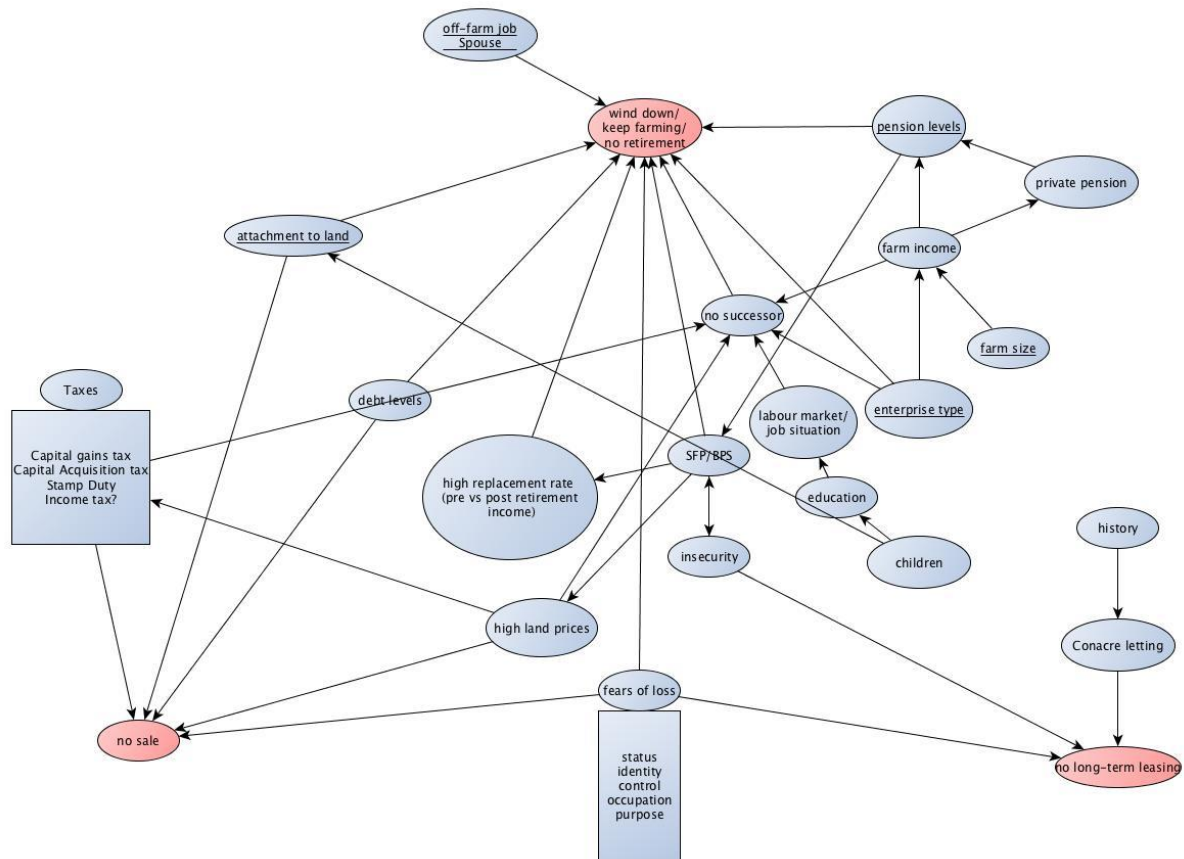


Figure 1: Barriers to land mobility according to literature review

Methodology

Two focus groups (one with dairy, one with beef farmers) have been conducted with farmers who have been involved with land transactions of one form or another. The objective of the focus groups was to explore the factors that influence land mobility. First, discussions were open and participants had opportunity to explain their very own experiences with regard to land mobility. This open discussion was crucial to understand barriers to land mobility as experienced by farmers. Second, factors were examined that have been identified as potential barriers to land mobility in the literature and were not brought up by participants. Finally, participants' were asked how these barriers could be alleviated or removed.

The focus groups discussions have been structured based on the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) (Figure 2). The Reasoned Action Approach (better known under the name of its predecessor 'Theory of Planned Behaviour') has been widely employed in the field of farmer decision-making (e.g. Fielding, Terry, Masser, & Hogg, 2008; Hansson, Ferguson, & Olofsson, 2013; Poppenborg & Koellner, 2013; Wauters, Bielders, Poesen,

Govers, & Mathijs, 2010; Zubair & Garforth, 2006). Although the RAA is typically used in quantitative studies, Sutherland (2010) showed that it can be employed in qualitative studies as well to structure data collection and analysis.

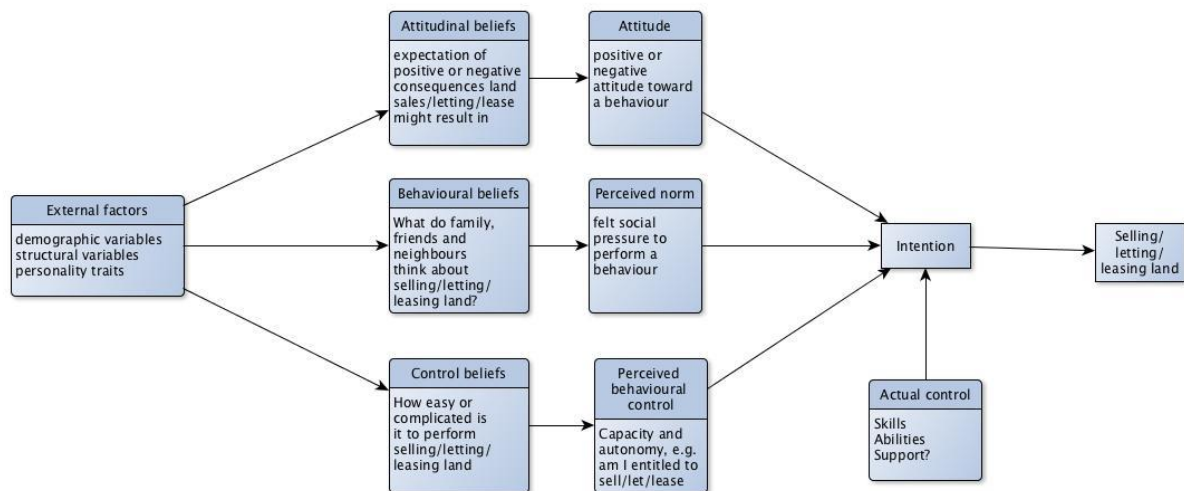


Figure 2: Conceptual model of barriers to decision-making with regard to land mobility; based on the RAA (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010)

Results

As the data analysis is still ongoing at the time of writing this abstract the results have to be treated as preliminary and might be subject to change.

In both groups a strong barrier to land mobility is the emotional attachment to the farm and the importance for the farm to stay in family ownership. This also seems to be an issue for the younger generation who is not interested in taking over the farm business and has found occupation outside agriculture. Furthermore uncertainties around the CAP reform and its repercussions on subsidy payments held farmers back to enter the land market. Another barrier identified so far were low pension incomes, which resulted in a need for a continued income from farming after retirement; this was somewhat more pronounced in the beef-farmer group.

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