

Land Consolidation as a Tool for Rural Development

Joachim THOMAS

Ministry of Environment and Conservation, Agriculture and Consumer Protection,
Schwannstr. 3, 40476 Düsseldorf, Germany, (e-mail: joachim.thomas@munlv.nrw.de)

1. Introduction

The EU's Rural Development Programme 2006-2013 (Second pillar of the CAP) treats the rural space as a whole. Besides special farm focussed and land use related measures the general livelihood of the rural population shall be improved. It is based on four axes:

Axis 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sector,

Axis 2: Improving the environment and the countryside,

Axis 3: Improving quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy,

Axis 4: Upgrading the endogenous potentials (Community Initiative for Rural Development (LEADER)).

This frame has to be made concrete and executed by the member states through National Development Programmes.

The programme is the one, an effective implementation the other! Within the implementation of national development programmes land consolidation is a useful, sometimes the crucial means for reaching the development goals; for often is the actual state of land ownership and land tenure structure the main obstacle for a prosperous evolution of the region concerned. Here, land consolidation is likely to support and to realize many of the development goals within the programme, particularly within axis 1, axis 3 and axis 4 (LEADER)

2. Land Consolidation isn't Land Consolidation

Land consolidation in a broader sense includes all measures bringing the actual land use and land rights in accordance with the planned or intended; in each case it means a change in land use and mostly in land tenure.

Land consolidation in the narrow sense is a legally regulated means for re-arranging of rural land; in its simplest performance it contains measures in order to merge fragmented parcels. In its most comprehensive manner an area concerned is reshaped and re-arranged to promote the general use of land and development of land and to benefit the general public with due regard for the respective structure of landscape.

Land consolidation can occur on voluntary base or can be executed as a compulsory procedure. Land consolidation has to fulfil private and/or public goals.

The design of the land consolidation approach depends on the resolving problems and intended goals and objectives.

3. Take the Right Tool!

Within the given tool box "land consolidation" there is some specific tools:

3.1 Voluntary Land Exchange

In a Voluntary Land Exchange two or some more people (mostly farmers) exchange their parcels on voluntary base by free negotiations in order to improve and optimise their working / farming conditions. Such negotiations need mostly a neutral moderating land management expert.

The negotiation result is executed by notary deed and introducing into the Real Property Cadastre and Land Registry. In some European countries the contracted exchange is executed and registered by the Land Consolidation/ Land Reform Agency through an administrative decision.

3.2 Merging of Parcels

Is land fragmentation or farm fragmentation a general problem within the area concerned, Merging of Parcels in large scale is the adequate approach. In order to improve the production and working conditions in agriculture and forestry a merging procedure is implemented. Rural land is regrouped in units of economic size and rational shape or rearranged in cooperation with the land owners concerned. It may also be initiated for measures of nature protection and landscape conservation.

This approach is required and suitable in communities, where the creation of a new rural road system and major water resource projects are not required.

The merging procedure can occur on voluntary base or as a compulsory administrative procedure with a compensation assessment ex officio by the Land Consolidation Authority; in each case a moderating expert (- team) is indispensable, convincing the involved land owners about the benefit, the implementation principles and conducting the large number of negotiations about the compensation agreements.

3.3 Simplified Land Consolidation

If besides reducing the land fragmentation a new rural road system has to be created and / or water management measures are requested, which have influence on the intended parcel structure, a Land Consolidation instrument is requested which is equipped with planning regulations and able to carry out measures to improve the agrarian structure, to make possibly water engineering measures, village renewal measures, measures of environmental protection, nature conservation and landscape development. Upon this, the Simplified Land Consolidation is also likely to resolve "land use conflicts"; it separates the public requirements to land from the private interests, sometimes in connection with an adjustment of the rural infrastructure in the intended land use.

3.4 Comprehensive Land Consolidation

A Comprehensive Land Consolidation pursues the broadest development approach in upgrading the area concerned. In a comprehensive land consolidation procedure, scattered or uneconomically shaped parcels will be consolidated to meet modern managerial requirements and reshaped, to obtain units of more favourable location, shape and size. Ways, roads, water bodies and other common facilities like drainage or irrigation systems are provided. Soil conserving, soil improving and landscaping measures are taken as well as any other measures improving the basic conditions of the farming enterprises, reducing the amount of work and facilitating farm management. Also the village area can be a field of improving activities within the land consolidation procedure; village renewal or even village development measures may be taken.

Additionally, in carrying out these measures public interests have to be save-guarded and particularly the requirements of the physical planning have to be taken into account, for instance a controlled urban and settlement evolution, protection of environment, conservation of nature and landscape, historic interests by conservation and upgrading the rural heritage, recreational requirements, water resource management, water supply, sewage disposal, energy supply, public transport etc.

3.5 Consolidating the Consolidated Areas

In wide areas of – particularly – West European countries an already consolidated agricultural structure is to state. But public planning and big infrastructure projects take negative influence in the given structure:

These projects need land in large scale, they separate the merged field blocks and create uncomfortable shaped parcels, they interrupt the direct access from the farm holdings to the field and they make the rural infrastructure anyhow partly useless. Typical occasions are the construction of highways, motorways, railways, enlargement of airports or harbours, measures of flood protection, nature conservation etc.

A land consolidation approach is likely to facilitate the intended project and to prevent the caused disadvantages of the project for the agriculture.

Are these circumstances given, such an approach is regularly applied in Belgium, France, the Netherlands; in Germany this approach is even obligatory by law.

4. How to Find the Right Land Consolidation Tool?

- The obtuse approach: making as before
- The empathic approach: copying the others
- The intelligent approach: making the decision
 - o on the base of a SWOT analysis
 - o and an integrated local development strategy,
 - o having in view the EU's RDP.

5. Land Consolidation: the gate towards sustainable rural development

Implementing the EU's Rural Development Programme at national level, land consolidation measures have crucial importance, in general; in particular different initiations and intensities are given; the report will demonstrate which land consolidation instruments are appropriate in order to pursue EU's and national programme goals.

Besides this, the national RDPs contain measures, that

- can support land consolidation (f.e. Local Rural Development Strategy),
- should flank land consolidation (f.e. incentives for land leasing, land banking),
- can be supported by land consolidation (f.e. Village Renewal and Village Development),
- can be enabled by land consolidation (f.e. restructuring and developing public infrastructure),
- should be flanked by land consolidation (afforestation of land, NATURA 2000 activities, LIFE projects).

In each case, Land Consolidation opens the gate towards a sustainable rural development in full accordance with EU's Rural Development Programme and the National Rural Development Plans. Therefore, land consolidation has to be introduced and embedded in each strategy for rural development, wherever in Europe.

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