

Understanding the development of regional foundations of care farms in the Netherlands. Contributions from transition theory and institutional entrepreneurship

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Abstract: *We analysed the development of regional foundations of care farms in the Netherlands. The initiatives were analysed with a conceptual framework based on transition sciences and institutional entrepreneurship. The presence of a committed institutional entrepreneur with vision, strategic competences and leadership to develop alliances, institutional support and legitimacy in the agricultural and care sector is important for developing a successful regional foundation of care farms. History and culture of regions and organisations are important aspects to take into account.*

Keywords: *Care farming – transition – institutional entrepreneurship - implementation*

Introduction

Characteristics of care farms

Care farming is a growing sector that combines agricultural production with health and social services (Hassink et al., 2007; Hine et al., 2008; Elings and Hassink, 2008). It is an interesting phenomenon because the agricultural sector is actively involved in providing care for different client groups. Care farms offer day care, supported workplaces, and/or residential places for clients with a variety of disabilities (Elings and Hassink, 2008). Target groups include people with a mental illness, addiction background, learning disabilities, the elderly, children, difficult youth, and long-term unemployed persons (Hassink et al., 2007, 2010). The number of care farms in the Netherlands has increased rapidly from 75 in 1998 to more than 800 in 2008 (Elings and Hassink, 2008). In 2005, 10 000 clients made use of a care farm in the Netherlands (Hassink et al., 2007).

Although care farming is perceived successful and innovative, various weaknesses and challenges were identified in a meeting of representatives of the main stakeholders of the care farming sector. The main challenges that were identified are: bridging the gap between the agricultural and care sector, and developing professional regional organisations of care farmers and sustainable financing structures (Blom and Hassink, 2008). Hence, one of the main problems care farmers face is finding adequate financing for the care services they provide (Ketelaars et al., 2002). Many care farmers are not recognised as official care institutions and depend on the willingness and collaboration of care institutions for the payment of care services. A positive development was the introduction of the personal budgets of clients (PGB) in 2003 which allows clients to compose their own package of care provisions. The PGB was introduced by the ministry of health to diversify the supply of care and to shorten waiting lists. With this PGB the client or the client's representatives can contract a care farm directly without interference of a care institution. This budget has become popular in recent years.

Due to a strategic lobby, two distinct ministries (Agriculture and Health) have decided to subsidise a national Support Centre Agriculture and Care in 1999. This Support Centre has accelerated the development of the sector.

Importance of developments at regional level

At regional level, organisations of care farmers have developed as well. There were (and still are) different levels of ambition between the regions. Some of them have opted for an AWBZ accreditation (formal status of a reimbursable care provision) others have restricted themselves to study groups of care farmers. AWBZ, the 'Exceptional Medical Expenses Act' is a public insurance, which covers exceptional medical expenses that are not part of the regular care insurances. A critical event in the process was the new option for regional foundations to get a collective AWBZ accreditation, which offered opportunities for negotiation with medical insurance companies as official care institutions. These regional initiatives of network formation are important for the development of the sector. Identified tasks of regional initiatives are the exchange of knowledge and experiences between the care and agricultural sectors, education of care farmers, matching demand and supply, and connecting care farms with policies at regional level (Kattenbroek and Hassink, 2003).

Objectives of this paper

The aims of this paper are to describe and analyse the development of two types of regional foundations of care farmers and identify the factors that contribute to a successful development. We think that a better understanding of regional initiatives can stimulate a successful development of the sector.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

We will provide a short overview of our framework and hypotheses. We consider the structuration theory of Giddens to be useful as a meta-theory for analysing the development of initiatives in care farming. Giddens stresses the importance of the interdependency of agency and structure (Giddens, 1986). Reflexive, strategic operating actors (agencies) have to deal with the structural context in which they find themselves and opportunities to change the structure. The connection of agriculture and care is a system innovation: a process in which multiple actors and knowledge domains are interlinked to develop radical new concepts for existing products and services (Grin and Weterings, 2005); an innovation that has to deal with existing structures and regimes in the agricultural and in the care sector.

Transition theory

Transition theory, especially its central element, the so called multilevel perspective (MLP) (Schot, 1998; Geels, 2005), is helpful to understand the interaction of agency and structure aspects, and initiatives in care farming and existing regimes. The multi level perspective (MLP) distinguishes three levels of heuristic analytical concepts: niche innovations, socio technical regimes and socio technical landscape (Geels, 2002; Geels and Schot, 2007). The socio technical regime refers to shared cognitive routines in a community. There are three dimensions (Raven, 2007): the technical dimension (dominant design), the social network dimension (role and position of actors in network) and the institutional dimension (legislation and policies, defining the space for actors to manoeuvre). The regime's cognitive, normative and regulative institutions act to establish and reinforce stability and cohesion of societal systems, but they also limit innovation to localised, incremental improvements (Geels, 2005). Niches form the micro-level where radical novelties emerge. Niches act as incubation rooms protecting novelties against mainstream market selection (Schot, 1998; Kemp et al., 1998). The socio technical landscape forms an exogenous environment beyond the direct influence of niche and regime actors (macro-economics, deep cultural patterns, macro-political developments). Changes at the landscape level usually take place slowly (decades).

MLP claims that regime shifts occur by interaction between multiple developments on the three levels. In order to connect dynamics at the three levels smartly, strategic action through multi-actor involvement and dispersed governance is required. It results in linkages that can overcome obstacles raised by the existing regime and path dependencies (Grin, 2006; 2010). Another insight is that transitions and system innovations involve purposeful, strategic actors and involve normative questions and the need to deal with power issues (Grin, 2009).

Care farming is typically a multi-sector spanning innovation that faces the challenges and opportunities of both agricultural and care regimes. Elzen et al. (2010) argue that there is an urgent need of a theory of good linking. In their view there is an important role of hybrid actors and hybrid forums. Hybrid actors are a category between insiders and outsiders. Until now, studies on this issue are scarce and seem to contradict each other. For instance Raven and Verbong (2007) claim that multi-regime dynamics can be beneficial when a niche innovation becomes linked as a solution to multiple regimes, but it can also create new problems and uncertainties about regulations, definitions, technical linkages and responsibilities (Schot and Geels, 2008).

Institutional entrepreneurship

Transition literature hardly distinguishes different types of agents. In care farming, the most important agents at regional level are entrepreneurs. Literature on entrepreneurship may help us to identify the competences of successful entrepreneurs. Here, we focus on institutional entrepreneurship. Regional initiatives are examples of new or changing organisations. Institutional entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in creating or changing institutions (Levy and Scully, 2007). An institutional entrepreneur is an individual or actor group who not only introduces a discrete innovation, but works to change the broader context so that the innovation has widespread appeal and impact (Maguire et al., 2004). Central topics in institutional entrepreneurship are field structure (implicit power in existing regimes), strategy, legitimacy and power (Levy and Scully, 2007). This institutional entrepreneur should combine strong leadership (determining the direction, bringing people on one track and motivating and inspiring people) with complex skills to be successful in a changing institutional environment. His tasks are to nurture and develop innovative practices (niche experiments), to connect them to the incumbent regime, and to connect to and create regime change. Relevant skills are cultural/cognitive skills like framing and persuading to deal with field power, procedural skills to deal with procedures in the care sector, political and interactional skills to link the initiative with the political agenda, and develop alliances (DiMaggio, 1998). Institutional entrepreneurs have to overcome structural power by outmanoeuvring field dominants (Barker et al., 2001). Network development is important in entrepreneurial processes as well. Discovery of opportunities, securing resources and gaining legitimacy are affected by network structure (Elfring and Hulsink, 2003; 2007). Network theory shows the importance of the right mix of strong and weak bonds (Elfring and Hulsink, 2003; Gilsing and Duysters, 2008).

Methodology

Data collection

The data were collected in 2009 according to the principles of the case study approach (Yin, 2009).

Case selection

The cases that were selected involved initiatives with which the first author has collaborated in projects during the last few years. The selection consisted of two regional foundations of care farms in different parts of the Netherlands, namely Landzijde in the province of North Holland and BEZIG in the province of Gelderland. Landzijde and BEZIG are initiatives that come from the agricultural

sector. These two cases differ in starting conditions and approach to develop a new organisation. BEZIG is a collective initiative of care farmers; Landzijde is an individual initiative of one farmer.

Procedure of data collection

We followed three main principles of data collection, which are favourable to the validity and reliability of case study findings. They were triangulation of data sources and methods for data collection; development of a case study database; maintenance of a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). For each case we interviewed the directors of the foundations, a member of the board of advice and the client manager of the health insurance company with which the foundation has a contract. We also organized a half day session with the employees of the foundations to discuss the development of the foundation.

Furthermore, we collected all available documents (like annual reports or business plans). Interviews were recorded on audiotape and used to make a verbatim report of each interview.

Data analysis

The collected data were compared to the initial framework and hypotheses (pattern matching; Yin, 2009). The data were used to reconstruct processes of decision making and environmental characteristics for each case separately, in retrospect. The findings were reviewed with the participants to increase validity.

Description of success

We defined success as the degree to which an initiative achieves its declared goals, the ability to ensure programme/service continuity and sustainability by acquiring the resources necessary to maintain current operations, and as the measure of resources available for growth and development (Sharir and Lerner, 2006). In addition we considered the degree to which farmers were assisted to be successful and the contribution to changes in the regime as other aspects of success.

Results

Short description of the development of the foundations of care farms

The association BEZIG was founded in 2004 by a few care farmers who had met in a study club for farmers. A study club is an informal regional organization of farmers that meet regularly in order to exchange experience among a certain topic. Their main motive was to share knowledge and experiences and the realisation of an AWBZ accredited foundation. The province supported the development of the association. The existing care farmers became members of new-BEZIG. In 2005 a foundation was established and the AWBZ accreditation was obtained in 2006. The members chose some care farmers to become board members. The foundation appointed a part time director and administrative support. In 2009, the members of BEZIG decided to integrate the foundation and association into a cooperation of care farmers. The assumption was that this would increase the involvement of farmers. Today, decisions are made by all care farmers. The services of BEZIG are exchange of experiences and information among care farmers, administration of AWBZ financed care and organising education for farmers. BEZIG organises two to three annual meetings for their members.

The idea of Landzijde emerged in 1999 from two farmers that were involved in a regional agricultural nature organisation. They recognised the lack of a matching organisation for care services on farms. At that time, there were hardly any care farms in the region. One farmer took the lead and decided to set up a foundation with an AWBZ accreditation, first under the umbrella of the agricultural nature organisation and soon as an independent foundation. The AWBZ accreditation was obtained in 2003.

Landzijde decided to develop a professional organisation with care experts and no farmers on the board. Today, clients and farmers are represented in an advisory board. The initiator of Landzijde became a full time director. In addition, care coordinators, administrative support and regional coordinators are employed. Landzijde organises four annual network meetings. The services of Landzijde are matching demand and supply of care services on farms at regional level, and supporting and educating care farmers and clients.

BEZIG and Landzijde have adopted a similar profit model. The foundations made financial agreements with health insurance companies for delivering care services on the farms. Farmers receive 80-85% of the available budget. The remaining money is used for the activities of the foundation.

Differences and similarities between BEZIG and Landzijde

BEZIG and Landzijde are representatives of two different organisational models. The Landzijde model is a subcontractor model, based on entrepreneurship of the director; the BEZIG model is a cooperation model based on consensus and joint entrepreneurship and responsibility. The main differences between Landzijde and BEZIG are summarised in Table 1.

The differences between BEZIG and Landzijde originate from their starting point and approach as indicated above. The initial goal of BEZIG was to unite care farmers and to develop an organisational structure for cooperation instead of developing a market oriented organisation. The initiators of Landzijde developed a market oriented concept and looked for farmers that were interested to work under the rules of the concept. The focus of BEZIG was directed internally at developing a joint understanding among care farmers. The network within the care sector remained limited. The focus of Landzijde was directed towards meeting the opportunities of the environment and extending the network in the care sector. The turnover of Landzijde increased rapidly. This enabled Landzijde to hire professional employees with knowledge of the care sector and procedures of the insurance companies. Landzijde is a well know organisation in the province and has developed a strong position. Landzijde has organised the organisation in such a way that it meets all demands of the health insurance companies.

The budget of BEZIG has increased more gradually. BEZIG faces the challenge to get out of the starting phase. They try to leave a vicious circle. Due to limited budget contracts with the health insurance companies, available financial resources for the organisation are limited. Due to these constraints, it is not possible to hire professionals with adequate knowledge of the care sector and procedures of the health insurance companies. Board members (care farmers) have to invest a lot of time in the organisation. This has resulted in a heavy work load for the board members and mistakes have been made. Another consequence is that investments in public relations, and networking in the care sector are limited. In the province of Gelderland, BEZIG is not a well known partner of care institutions, client organisations and municipalities. Another handicap is that BEZIG does not meet all demands of the health insurance companies. BEZIG has for example not initiated the obliged client representation in their organisation. This results in a deduction of the budget from the health insurance companies.

An important difference in the working methods of both organisations is that in case of Landzijde, clients looking for a care farm contact the central office of Landzijde. A coordinator of Landzijde visits some of the care farms with the client, and the client can select his favourite farm. In case of BEZIG, interested clients contact an individual care farmer. BEZIG is not involved in the matching process. A farmer can choose whether BEZIG will take care of the financing of the care service. In many cases, a care farmer proposes a client to apply for a personal budget, because this tariff is higher than the one paid by BEZIG.

Table 1. Characteristics of BEZIG and Landzijde.

	BEZIG	Landzijde
Background	Care farmers unite and initiate organisation	Two entrepreneurs initiate a foundation and search for farmers to work under the umbrella of the foundation
Approach	Development towards joint entrepreneurship of farmers. Focus on consensus	Strong central coordination and leadership
Position of farmers	Owners	Subcontractors, advisors
Entrepreneurship	Distributed among board of farmers. No clear leader	Director; characteristics of institutional entrepreneur
Environment -General attitude -Image of foundation at health insurance company -Network care sector -Alliances with care partners -Being well known	Following Positive Limited No Limited	Pro-active Very positive Extensive Yes Yes
Organisation - Matching client - farm - Focus -Profit model -Professional organisation - Board - Freedom of farmers - Identity	Clients contact individual farmers Joint commitment of farmers Yes Farmers Not yet Freedom in degree of involvement For the farmers	Clients contact central organisation Effective, competent Yes External experts Yes Strict rules For clients businesslike
Size (in 2009)		
Number of farmers	25	102
Number of clients	100	700
Number of employees (fte)	1.2	5.7
Annual turnover (million Euro)	570	3900

Degree of success of BEZIG and Landzijde

We can conclude that BEZIG is partly successful in achieving its objectives. Due to limited resources, services for the farmers are limited. Although most care farmers in the region are a member of BEZIG, it is a continuous challenge to keep them involved. This is due to the limited added value for most care farmers and their prime focus on their own care farm.

Landzijde is a well known organisation in the province. It has developed a good network in the care sector, has strong alliances with care partners, and is appreciated by the health insurance companies as an innovative and transparent organisation. Landzijde is successful in attracting resources. In its development phase it was subsidised by the province. It has contracts with the health insurance company, the city of Amsterdam and care institutions. It assists farmers to become a care farmer. Approximately 75% of the care farmers in the province would not have become a care farmer without the support of Landzijde. Landzijde has not changed the structure, culture or practices of the dominant care regime. It has become an accepted partner in the social network. However, Landzijde has challenged the dominant regime in the agricultural sector. It is new for the care farming sector to develop an organisation that is not controlled by the farmers themselves, but by external professionals. BEZIG has not become a known player in the care field. In addition, it did not challenge the dominant agricultural culture (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in success between BEZIG and Landzijde.

Success factors	BEZIG	Landzijde
Achievement of goals	Partly	Yes
Availability of resources	Limited	Sufficient
Services for farmer	Limited: education, exchange, financial arrangements	Extensive: 75% of care farmers would not have started care services
Changes in regime	No	Limited in the care sector Larger in the agricultural sector

Success factors for regional foundations of care farms

Based on the interviews with stakeholders involved in Landzijde and BEZIG, we conclude that a committed institutional entrepreneur is crucial for success. Such an entrepreneur must develop legitimacy in the agricultural and care sector, a hybrid network, sustainable alliances and generate institutional support.

Discussion and conclusions

We hypothesised that system innovations like regional foundations of care farms need purposeful, strategic actors; institutional entrepreneurs, with a creative and proactive response to environmental opportunities. We observed that two different models of regional foundations of care farms have evolved. The Landzijde model is characterised as a subcontractor model, based on institutional entrepreneurship of the director; the BEZIG model is a cooperation model based on consensus and joint ownership. The lessons of Landzijde are in line with our hypotheses. Success is due to the interplay between leadership and making optimal use of opportunities in the environment.

We showed the importance of committed leadership and institutional entrepreneurship. Important characteristics are vision, and political, interactional and procedural competences to generate institutional support. Important tasks are dealing with power and developing a hybrid network that can be used. The initiator of Landzijde has made optimal use of the opportunities in the environment. He has contacted and generated support by influential persons to get support from the province, the city of Amsterdam and health insurance companies. This focus on opportunities in the environment, formation of alliances, time investment and a clear vision and strategy about how to build a strong and reliable organisation is the base of his success. It shows the importance of networks for securing resources, discovery of opportunities, and gaining legitimacy in the agricultural and care sector (Elfring and Hulsink, 2003). In the initial phase Landzijde developed a complete new network in the care sector and used some strong ties in the agricultural sector. It has resulted in some strong ties and alliances with care partners (e.g. Streetcornerwork) and contracts. The director of Landzijde had a clear strategy, he only invested in alliances with care institutions that were beneficial for Landzijde. At the same time Landzijde continued to invest in new ties, such as research organisations and innovation programmes that contributed to legitimacy and resources. The availability of resources enabled Landzijde to develop a professional organisation. This was an important issue for the health insurance company.

BEZIG had no clear institutional entrepreneur as a leading person. In the BEZIG model, the development has been more by fits and starts and board members face the challenges of getting care farmers involved and responsible. Risks in this model are the (too) high demands on board members, ineffective use of resources due to changing objectives, limited interaction with the environment, limited progress due to the focus on consulting members and reaching consensus, and lack of professional support. The cases showed that this has resulted in attracting insufficient resources and problems in developing a professional organisation. It teaches us that institutional entrepreneurship is important in situations where changes are needed at institutional level. This requires a pro-active and strategic approach and the ability to deal with power.

Although the development of Landzijde is a success story in most regions, care farmers do not want to copy this model. The general opinion is that a foundation of care farms should be a cooperative type of organisation owned by the care farmers themselves. The Landzijde model was also criticised, because it suppresses real entrepreneurship of care farmers. Most of the Landzijde farmers would never have started a care farm without the support of Landzijde. For these care farmers, Landzijde has been crucial to make the step. We hypothesise that the emergence of the Landzijde model in North Holland is due to the fact that in this area farmers have a long tradition in broadening activities and collaboration. It has resulted in the establishment of an agricultural nature association. This organisation was the basis for establishing a new organisation focussing on agriculture and care. In the region of BEZIG, the collaboration of farmers was a new development.

The cases show the specific challenges of a multi spanning innovation like care farming. Landzijde shows the importance of developing a network with hybrid actors. Due to the development and good use of weak and strong ties in both the agricultural and the care sector, they obtained legitimacy in both domains. This has enabled them to benefit from multi-regime dynamics. The initiatives are supported because they are thought to offer solutions to the health care (socialisation of care, reduction of waiting lists) and the agricultural regime (survival of farm enterprises and the agricultural landscape). In this case care farming has benefited from opportunities in both regimes. This is in line with findings of Raven and Verbong (2007).

Integrating transition theory and its multi level perspective with institutional entrepreneurship has enriched our theoretical framework. We think that the analysed initiatives give a good picture of the diversity of initiatives and of the factors that lead to success. They provide useful information that can stimulate a further successful development of the sector.

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