

Sharing farmers' lifeworld – advisors key to sustainable farm development

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Abstract:

Recent studies show that the viability of Swedish farms lies below the long-term sustainable level, a negative trend over the last 10 years. Policy makers within the agricultural sector have responded by trying to stimulate farmers' entrepreneurship and innovative capacity. The aim of this paper is to describe and critical analyze the development of advisory trends in Sweden during the last 20 years. We identify four distinct phases, including a) "The Farm Business Manager", b) external cost reductions, c) "Business Coaching", and d) Lean Philosophy. The purpose behind most initiatives is well grounded, in that they focus on the farmer's motives and resources. But we put this in contrast to a relative low level of success of these interventions.

We claim that a deeper and emphatic understanding of farmers' lifeworld is necessary to support a sustainable development of both farms and farmers. Still, most initiatives taken over the last decades does not put farmer first, and when approaching the Weltanschauung of farmers it is not the production advisors that get involved. We argue that advisors need to be more self-critical toward their limited understanding of farmers' situation. Furthermore, advisors must critically reflect upon both their own and farmers' Weltanschauung. But it is not until advisors and farmers actively start to participate in each other's lifeworld that we have an opportunity to really support the farmers in their ambitions. The result being collaborative and sustained actions. This not so much a learning method, as it is an expression of a conscious ethic and a concrete way of relating to others.

Setting the scene – the agricultural trend in Sweden

Since Sweden joined the European Union in 1995 the value of the Swedish food market has increased with 2% each year. However, during the same period the Swedish food production has decreased with the same amount (Berg, 2011). Every year LRF Consulting, which is an affiliate to The Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) and also Sweden's largest accounting business, present the report *Lantbrukets lönsamhet*. When the preliminary report for 2011 was launched, it showed that the profitability for Swedish farms lies below the long-term sustainable level in order to sustain employment and create growth. According to LRF Consulting this has been the trend for the last 10 years. Although most farm companies have learned to manage annual fluctuations in profitability, a declining profitability over a longer period of time is not possible. Active farmers choose another work and we see fewer younger willing to continue when there is a change of generations (LRF Konsult, 2011). This trend also has negative implications on other agricultural related activities and values.

Policy makers have not stand passive in this matter. During the past fifteen years we have seen responses on many levels; from changes in the preconditions for farming, to market-based initiatives to stimulate farmer's entrepreneurial skills and innovative capacity. The policy approach is characterised by being pluralistic. Nevertheless, the measures taken do not seem to have had as strong impact on the farming community as anticipated. The main challenge still exists.

Lifeworld – a crucial concept for advisors who want to understand farmers

In order to be able to give an appropriate advice to a person, it is essential to know and understand as much as possible about that person's whole situation. We believe the lifeworld concept to be a valuable perspective to grasp farmer's complexity. By the lifeworld Habermas (1987) means the shared common understandings, including values that develop through face to face contacts over time in various social groups, from families to communities. Allen (2008) claims that lifeworld or *Lebenswelt* refers to "the pre- and unconscious factors and experiences that ground or anchor human individuals and communities in physical and historical-cultural lifeworlds for which they have no reflective or chosen responsibility". Inspired by Habermas, Nitsch (2009) states that the lifeworld is the social environment, the work environment and work culture that together create the farmer's weekday. The lifeworld is thus the world where we live our everyday life and it is rooted and expressed through a communicative community which to a great extent is unconscious for us. Hence, it is in the lifeworld that the farmer develops his values, thought patterns and habits (Nitsch, 2009).

It is within this relational space that the communicative acts (Habermas, 1987) take place which define our horizon of everyday life. The lifeworld integrate all sorts of assumptions about who we are as people and what we value about ourselves: what we believe, what we aspire to, what we desire, what we are willing to sacrifice to which ends, etc. Lifeworlds are simultaneously personally-experienced realities and socially shared understanding. Consequently, in society there is a diversity of lifeworlds. To participate in each other's lifeworld is to share a common sense of who "we" are. This "we" is what the advisors and farmer create when sharing lifeworld.

Aim and method

The aim with this paper is to describe and critical analyze the main trends in advisory services in Sweden during the past 20 years with the ambition to support the farmers to become more competitive. The paper also seeks to analyze why the strategies does not seem to have been effective and to give recommendations for future initiatives.

In this study we apply a multi-methodological approach. The description of a historical development, that constitutes the empirical data in this paper, is based on an extensive literature review. Very little peer-reviewed material is written in this context, why different sources have been used, like company reports, internal documents, mail conversations, web material, and news articles. The data covers the period from 1992-2011. The access to the internal material has been made possible both thanks to Mr Ljung's role as Extension Specialist – in which he supports advisors and advisory organisations in their change processes – and the action research method that we often use. Additional information has been gathered through interviews with different actors within the Swedish AKIS during the past five years, as part of other research projects. It is important to emphasise that our description of a historical development is one out of many possible interpretations, and furthermore that our analysis is delimited to interventions which aimed to increase farm viability competitiveness.

In this paper we have chosen the lifeworld concept as the analytical lens through which we interpret the implemented strategies and interventions. The reason for choosing this lens is that we are interested to understand whether the initiatives taken has started from an interest about the farmer's situation – his/her lifeworld – or if the starting point rather has been an outside-in/top-down perspective.

Trying to reverse the negative trend

The data we have gone through is full of projects that in different ways aim to support the Swedish farmer to be more competitive. Most of the projects are run by LRF – The Federation of Swedish Farmers, which is an independent interest and business organization for the green industry. LRF is the largest organization for small enterprises in Sweden and among others it “seeks to create the appropriate conditions for sustainable and competitive companies” (LRF, 2012). These interventions are part of general discourses often initiated by LRF and directed both to the public as an awareness-raising strategy, and also towards those in decision-making positions with power to change the political prerequisites of being a small enterpriser in the agricultural sector.

In our data presentation we have grouped the initiatives in four different phases of strategies as a first-order analysis. The phases, which are presented in figure 1, are not separate from each other, but rather parallel strands overlapping each other in time and space. We have chosen to highlight those processes that we think have had a major impact on the direction of the development. At the same time Swedish agriculture have been full of many other initiatives and projects, which of course have contributed to the whole.

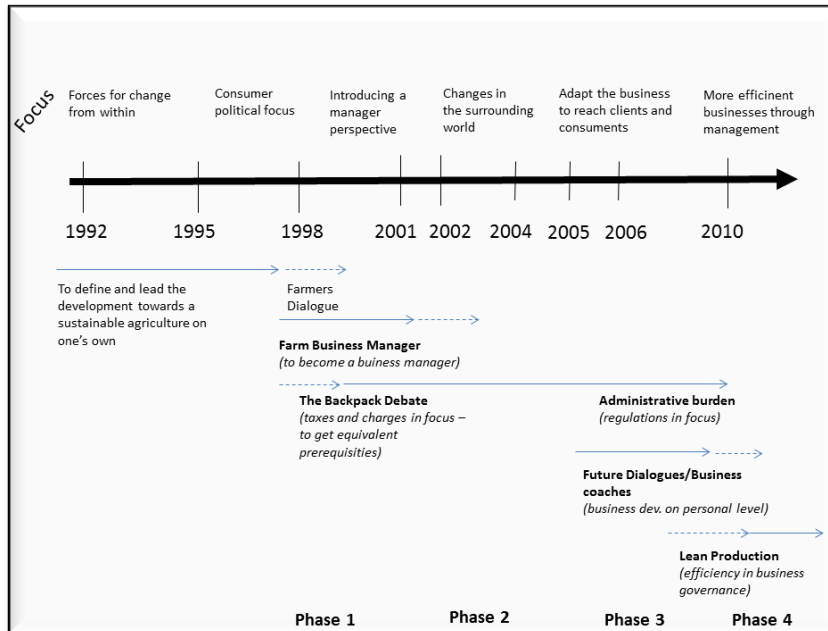


Figure 1. Main strategies and initiatives of interventions concerning farm development in Sweden 1990-2010.

Four phases of strategies to make Swedish agriculture more competitive

The time before the first phase

Before presenting the four identified phases, it is appropriate to describe how the farming conditions were in Sweden before 1998. In the aftermath of the Bruntland Report from 1987, much of the Swedish agricultural debate dealt with environmental and sustainability issues. Between 1992 and 1996 LRF had a campaign that internationally was known as “The Farmers Revolt”, but in Sweden was labelled “Swedish Farmers towards the cleanest agriculture in the world” (our translation). The aim with such a commitment was to create engagement and knowledge about the perceived surplus value of Swedish produced food, but also to establish an alliance between Swedish consumers and Swedish farmers. Within “The Farmers Revolt”, LRF employed regional project managers who were to lead the development process towards a sustainable agriculture. According to Ståhle (2011) “The Farmers Revolt” was a successful initiative, but unfortunately the leadership of LRF lacked endurance and wearied when the communication started to get a proper impact. New interventions were already planned for.

The first phase – changing the self-image

In 1998 LRF launched the project *Bondeföretagaren*, “The Farm Business Manager”, which aimed to increase the profitability among farm companies. The venture was much about changing the self-image among farmers, and to improve their ability to think and act as businessmen. “The Farm Business Manager” was described as an intervention for increased sustainability, where a well-functioning market is necessary for sustained agricultural activity. The project was not working on its own, but was part of a larger venture from the farming sector in Sweden. Parallel to “The Farm Business Manager” the project “The Farmer’s Dialogue” ran. While the former aimed to increase profitability on farm level over a shorter period, the latter had a higher ambition and also a longer time-perspective. The aim was to formulate a national policy for sustainable food production through deliberative dialogues among farmers on local level (LRF, 1998; Ljung, 2001).

The practical work within “The Farm Business Manager” was mainly carried out through study circle meetings with collaboration and cooperation as its characteristics. Through discussions the first step aimed at making an action plan for the own company on how to best meet the future. The action plan should contain a business idea, goal and guidelines for the future, which in the second step should be realised. Through “The Farm Business Manager” the farmer should learn to distinguish between his/her business idea and life idea – what life quality is for oneself and how to reach personal goals. Put another way: “do you work to live a good life” or “do you live in order to work”?

The second phase – profitability through cost reductions

The second phase was another strand in the agricultural debate, emerging approximately at the same time as the “Farm Business Manager”. It has been part of the public debate in Swedish agriculture since then. This strand is more reactive and passive in its character. The focus was twofold; first the competitive disadvantages that the Swedish farmers felt they had in comparison with their colleagues in other EU-countries, secondly the low efficiency on farm level. The LRF president at that time, Mr. Jonsson, introduced what in Sweden came to be called “The Backpack Debate”. The backpack was described as a metaphor for the heavy burdens that Swedish farmers had to carry, both in form of higher taxes on input supplies and higher costs due to the Swedish animal welfare and environmental legislation. The rhetoric used in this debate was that it did not really matter how good the Swedish farmers were, as long as they were slaves under unequal demands. This development was reinforced by the Swedish membership in the

European Union in 1995. After Sweden's entrance the rules concerning government procurement became more difficult to manage, which resulted in an increased food imports.

Together, these two aspects contributed to an enhanced price pressure within agriculture, which resulted in a focus on cost reductions in advisory services, or as one leading manager in the advisory system expressed it: "It's time to hunt the next penny on your farm" (Söderberg, 2005). While the advisory organisation put emphasis in cost efficiency, LRF tried to change the external preconditions. Behind this was an unspoken belief that if only the backpack could be taken off, the hidden entrepreneurship of farmers would start blooming. The debate ended up with different reduction in taxes during the following seven years, but the mental picture of the Swedish government's unjust treatment of the farmers somehow still exists. In 2006 the focus shifted towards the perceived problems farmers have due to the extensive and complicated bureaucracy and a new debate raise – "The administrative burden".

The third phase – mobilization and looking forward

As often, trends tend to be repeated. In the early 2000's LRF discussed its vision for 2010 and in 2003 the annual general meeting decided on a couple of long-term goals. The vision got the headline "We make the country grow" and the vision said "*In 2010 the green industry shall take a leading position in Sweden when it comes to growth, profitability and youth's choice of a profession*" (LRF, 2003). In 2005 LRF allocated 250 million SEK (approximately 27.000.000 Euros) to a coordinated effort that they labelled *Kraftsamling*, "Mobilization". The aim with the "Mobilization" activities was to stimulate the members to develop their own businesses making the vision come true. A strong focus was also on general knowledge generation in areas which were seen as bottle-necks for growth on farm level. Hence, LRF shifted focus towards the individual business manager again. The practical work was carried out by using different methods. One important part was through traditional knowledge intermediate activities, such as courses, seminars, study circles and individual advisory services. The other part, however, was more innovative in its character. By the means of regional *business coaches* and individual *future dialogues* at farm level, LRF wanted to assist their members to utilize each farm's resource base and possibilities, and to help them to develop their business idea.

The basic idea by working with business coaches is that the farm manager himself has the best strategies for how his business ought to develop. The ambition is to help the farmers to set overall goals for their business, but not supporting them in making business plans. This latter activity is something for traditional advisory services. A survey by LRF in 2011 showed that the farmers who actually set operating objectives were more satisfied with their economical result than those who did not (LRF, 2011). Notable is also that these farmers were less disposed to blame the business result on the surrounding world. The activities as such have obviously made them reflect upon their own role for business success.

The "Future Dialogues" was managed by the advisors in LRF Consultancy and similar concepts have later been part of other advisory organisations tool box. A "Future Dialogue" aimed to give the farmer and the whole family support, so that they could make decisions on how to act in order to best utilize the business' resources and future possibilities. During the advisory visit a SWOT-analysis of the business was made, followed by a discussion on driving forces and how to best develop the company. Within three months from the advisory visit, there was also a follow-up discussion. Today the "Future Dialogues" is a rather marginalized advisory concept, since LRF ended their subsidies for its members in 2010. The idea of "Future Dialogues", however, remains – the importance to develop a business plan as a guideline for future decisions. These ideas have spread and nowadays the Board of Agriculture and the County Administrations demands a

business plan connected to applications for financial support for investments and projects within the national Rural Development Program.

The fourth phase – developing the management skills

The last phase can be understood as a continuation of the concept behind the business coaches. In short, it is the introduction of Lean Production Philosophy into the Swedish agricultural sector, which was initiated in 2009. Worth noting is that at this time it is not LRF that is the driver, but advisors, extension developers and researchers in a collaborative effort. Earlier both the farmers and the advisors had understood the importance of having knowledge about the market and trends, and also of setting goals and developing a business plan. What was lacking was a competence on how to use this in everyday practice on farm level. Moreover, advisors have noticed an increased demand from farmers to develop services regarding management issues. Thus Lean was identified as a possible answer to this situation.

The work of applying Lean Philosophy in Swedish agriculture is still in its infancy. In short one could say that Lean is both a management philosophy and a production practice – and working with Lean as a guiding approach is thus both a way of thinking and making use of a tool box. For instance, it could be about streamlining the production so that each activity creates an added value to the end product, to identify unnecessary waste to save the resources, or it could be to involve all personal so that their full potential of contributing is taken care of. The starting point is by identifying the value of what is being produced from the perspective of the end consumer. The production is scrutinized in order to detect such activities in the production that do not create added values for the customer, and thus need to be reduced or improved. Through continuous improvements, standardised routines, and always having quality in mind, the hypothesis is that time is released which could be used more productively.

Analysis and discussion

What do we see through the lenses of the lifeworld concept?

By studying the economic reports of Swedish agriculture over the past 10 years, one can conclude that despite good ambitions the success of the mentioned initiatives seems to be rather low. One reason for this could be that the points of departure in the initiatives studied seldom seem to be the farmer and his/her whole situation. In the first phase – “The Farm Business Manager” – LRF wanted to help the farmers to change their self-image. This change, however, was not requested from the farmers themselves at that time; it was rather part of the rhetoric belonging to the abstract system in a Habermasian sense. In the second phase the focus was on economic issues and to make the farm businesses more profitable. In this phase the farm was reduced to its financial statement without a deeper interest in the farmer's own ambitions with his/her enterprise. In the third phase, that included the ventures on business coaches and future dialogues, we can see an emerging interest for the farmer's lifeworld. But even if these advisory encounters express an interest for new dimensions in farming, the main focus is still to identify and formulate a business idea. The fourth phase – the introduction of Lean in agriculture – suits well with the frustration recognized in the second phase, about the low efficiency on farm level. Working according to the Lean philosophy, will probably make some farmers less frustrated but it is unlikely that it will provide more sustainable farming businesses.

We claim that the problem for LRF, as representing the Habermasian system, to meet and understand the farmers' lifeworld is at least three-fold. First, LRF – who in this context is to be seen as an influential and financially strong actor – is suffering from a project-thinking culture that

not only prevents but also makes it complicated to run the kind of long-term development processes that probably are needed in order to reverse the negative trend. Secondly, we believe that not only LRF, but most actors within the Swedish AKIS need to develop their understanding of farmers' lifeworld, and to be able to reflect upon and questioning their own and the farmers' *Weltanschauung*. This is necessary if we are to build our future interventions on farmers' interests and needs, developing a sustainable agriculture putting the farmer first. Thirdly, although there has been and still are many meetings going on between farmers, business coaches and advisors, arenas for innovation and value-creation (Frankelius & Vogel, 2009) seem still to be missing.

Understanding and questioning ones *Weltanschauung*

Even if we claim that the big challenge in order to succeed to reverse today's negative trend is an enhanced interest and understanding of the farmers' lifeworld, this alone will not suffice. It will also require an ability to question both one's own as well as the farmer's *Weltanschauung*. Koltko-Rivera (2004) writes that the German *Weltanschauung* means a view or perspective on the world or universe "used to describe one's total outlook on life, society and its institutions" (Wolman, 1973). No matter which *Weltanschauung* an individual has, it will have powerful effects on cognition and behaviour (Kolto-Rivera, 2004). Compared to the lifeworld concept, Allen (2008) claims that a person's *Weltanschauung* is self-aware and open to inquiry – "*Weltanschauung* becomes a personal narrative based on intellectual and emotional commitments that are not pre-given, as it were, but arrived at through a process of examination and reflection". The *Weltanschauung* is thus a pre-understanding of a more cognitive and evaluative character both ontologically and epistemologically.

We believe that all actors within the Swedish AKIS need to develop their ability to question their own *Weltanschauung*. In order to be innovative we have to raise the awareness about our mental frames. Basically we have to understand what we take for granted and learn to question existing assumptions. One way to get there is through critical and reflective dialogues with others. For many of the organisations that support farmers today they act within established frames of reference, implying that they become less and less relevant for innovative change. At most, they can facilitate new venues where different perspectives challenge each other and innovative ideas might emerge.

Understanding the farmer's lifeworld

In order to support the farmer in his/her development processes we claim that it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of the farmer's lifeworld. We claim that if advisors and agricultural officers would be interested in the farmer's whole life situation they would not be restricted to only optimizing the farmer's managerial skills; neither would they work with only one issue at a time in different initiatives and projects. To reach this deeper level of understanding, the actors communicating must share not only a common language, but also to share lifeworlds to some extent. The best way to enter a person's lifeworld is to participate in it. For advisors this is a challenge. Belonging to the tradition of science, knowledge transfer and institutionalized culture, the scientific perspective which separate "subjects" and "objects," thought and action, people and environments are inadequate to investigate this lifeworld and block the advisor's ability to fully participate in the lifeworld of the other.

The diversity and differences of lifeworlds is never made explicit in advisory encounters. At most, the advisors strive to understand the farmer's perspective, his experience, visions, strengths and weaknesses. It is analytical, applying a communicative distance, and using more or less hidden tools to 'help' the farmer change. Few opportunities exist for establishing a discourse for learning and interpenetration of the different lifeworlds. The problem is not that farmers and advisors have

different views, use different discourses and belong to different communities, or have different goals and purposes. Rather, problems arise when people who aim to work together, such as farmers and advisors, do not engage each other in dialogues that could make each other aware of, and bridge the gap between, their worlds. We see few exchanges of this kind in the different phases analyzed, and both the farmers and advisors appear to collude in leaving the things as they are – a critical distance to the communicative actions seldom arises. Consequently, they fail to create a situation comparable to an interpenetration of cultures, of lifeworlds which would enable the farmers and their advisors to develop common understandings on the basis of shared experience.

In the personal domain of a lifeworld, decisions and rationality take different shapes and must be approached in particularistic rather than standardized ways. The ability to enter the farmer's subjective lifeworld thus implies participating with and approaching the other with a specific attitude. Furthermore, a decisive quality of the other is in fact that the other is other. Because of the perspective of within the advisory field where advisors are supposed to work, an advisor can easily forget that one lacks precisely this unique knowledge about the farmer. Of course, our knowledge of and experience about the farmer can never replace his/her genuine experience of his or her lifeworld. But we can in each encounter always try to get as close as possible.

When both advisors commit to engage with the lifeworld of farmers, more of their personal agenda is voiced, and farmers become recognized as unique human beings. But if farmer use the voice of their lifeworld, but it is ignored or blocked by advisors use of voice of science or institutional jurisdictions, the possibility to find the farmer's deeper motivation vanish. Our analysis supports the premise that increased use of the lifeworld enables better outcomes and more socially responsible treatment of farmer's as unique human beings. To reach this point, to gain entry to the lifeworld of a farmer, the advisor has to enter a situation where the farmer becomes the teacher, and the advisor the student.

Synthesis: Merging the four phases with the concepts *Weltanschauung* and lifeworld

Before we discuss which implications these thoughts could have for the future, it is appropriate to summarize the article so far. In figure 2 we have placed the four phases in a four-quadrant diagram with two continuums; from concrete and practical contemporary issues to questions with a visionary focus (horizontal), and from an interest on the farmer as an individual to the farm as a business (vertical). The circles in the diagram represent different dimensions of the 'self' (c.f. Mead, 1934). In the inner circle we find the lifeworld, where we act unreflectively in a way which we are socialized in and which we do not tend to question. Following Meads (1934) terminology, this is where the 'I' acts. 'I's actions are expressions of concrete responses containing inherent meanings. Applied to the farmer's lifeworld this is where his acts are purposeful, meaningful and without doubt. The outer circle represents the *Weltanschauung* – a reflective part of the self. Here we find the 'me' (Mead, 1934), which is a capacity to take the attitude towards one's own self. Applied to the farmer's *Weltanschauung* this is where his acts are reflected upon, boundary judgments questioned, and pre-understanding made visible. From this perspective, it is the two sides of our 'self' – the 'I' and the 'me' – which simultaneously create a sense of structure, continuity, and rationality, as well as freedom, creativity, and transformation (c.f. Joas, 1996). Like the 'I' and the 'me' of the self, the lifeworld and the *Weltanschauung* of an individual are complementary in the sense that they are distinct from each other by their very function, but still inseparable. Outside the *Weltanschauung* (figure 2) we find the Habermasian system, where money, rules and impersonal relations are in focus. The system is not a direct part of the self, but rather a structure limiting the development of the self. On the one hand the self is included in the

system as we all are citizens, consumers, etc., on the other hand the self is free from the abstract system as it is grounded in an unique, lived and embodied experience.

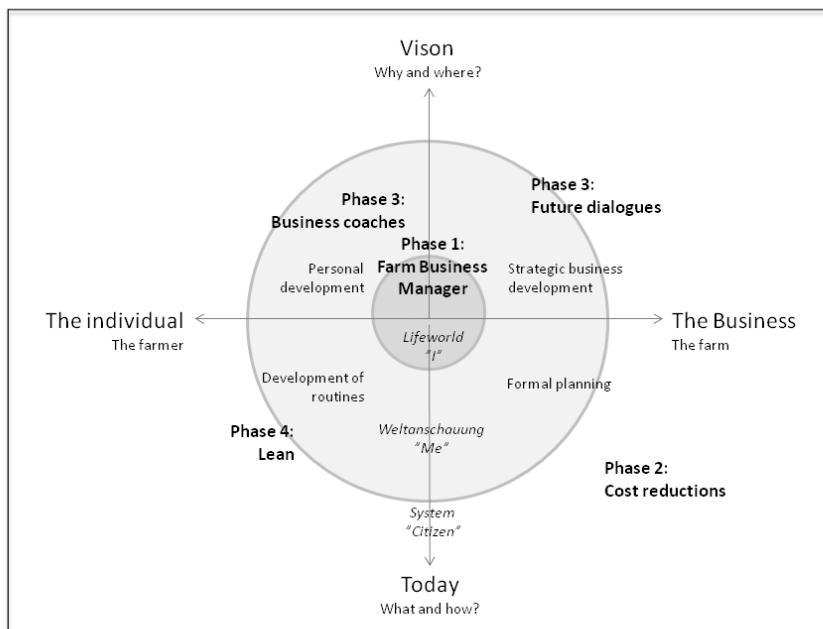


Figure 2: A synthesis: Merging the four phases with the concepts *Weltanschauung* and *lifeworld*.

When the phases are placed both according to their focus and their relation to *lifeworld*, *Weltanschauung* and *system*, it becomes clear that most of the advisory initiatives taken so far have had a focus which is rather peripheral in relation to the farmer's lived experience. As we see it, it was only in "The Farm Business Manager" project where the farmer's *lifeworld* got attention. Unfortunately, the production advisors were not part of this project. The exercise of formulating thoughts around the life idea was intended solely for the farmer himself. In phase 3 both the Business coaches and the advisors conducting the Future Dialogues approached *Weltanschauung* – the former more than the latter – but the critique remains: the production advisors are not a part of these dialogues. Phase 2 and 4 are both part of the abstract system approaching the farmer from outside. Focus is on working with tools and techniques rather than with people. Notable and not surprising, these two phases was and is still run by the farmers' production advisors. The initiatives behind hunting costs and introducing Lean are also driven by extension organizations and not, for example, by the member organization LRF. The production advisors in Sweden are by history trained within the system and it is also where they have their competence and comfort zone. To become more interested in the farmer as a unique individual – and approach his *lifeworld* and together dare to question their *Weltanschauung* – will probably be of great importance if the negative trend shall be reversed. Even if short-term projects can be a good way to raise the awareness and create leverage around a certain topic, continuity is probably more important when it comes to learning for change and development. Obviously the advisors role need to be modified, and new abilities need to be learned in order for the equation to work out. A first step could be to enhance the advisors' consciousness and competence in self- and system-critique, f.i., their own and others boundary judgments (Ulrich, 2001).

Conclusions

We can see a tendency that the conventional production advisors mostly stay within the Habermasian system, and only occasionally enter the *Weltanschauung*. An important part of the production related advisory service is based on different kinds of computer models, developed within the system for the system. Although these models are support tools for decision-making, the outcomes are sometimes criticised for giving too generalised recommendations (Höckert & Ljung, 2003). As long as the advisors and the bureaucrats stay within the system, we claim it will be impossible to find the farmer's motivation to develop his farm, neither the whole agricultural system, in a more sustainable way. We believe that in order to make the recommendations produced within the system relevant for the farmer, they have to be adapted to the farmers *Weltanschauung*. It is only then that we can meet the farmers' interest and motivation and facilitate practical change. One way to approach the *Weltanschauung* is by improving the advisors awareness and skills in critical systems thinking (Flood and Romm, 1996).

The notion of self- and system-critique

Ulrich (2001) distinguishes between self-critique and boundary critique as two important competences needed to clarify the value judgements that underlie the decisions we make. To be critical to yourself, for instance as an advisor, means to understand ones self-limitations and be aware of and question ones pre-understanding, procedures, findings, and the way in which one translate all this into practical recommendations (Ulrich, 2001). Our experience is that advisors often question and worry about their competence in relation to their specific subject expertise, but not regarding their understanding of and relation to the farmer.

To make boundary judgements are inevitable, as they are a consequence of our inability to consider 'the whole system' (Ulrich, 2001). The process of systematic boundary critique imply "a systematic unfolding of both the empirical and the normative selectivity of (alternative sets of) boundary judgements, that is, of how the 'facts' and 'values' we recognize change when we alter the considered system (or situation) of concern" (Ulrich, 2001). To critically reflect on the set boundaries and make them open for discussion is then crucial in order to reach a mutual understanding (in the *Weltanschauung*) where the involved actors are able to understand – and consequently also accept or reject –the consequences of planned changes.

We claim that it is not just the advisors, but many actors within the Swedish AKIS (including governmental bureaucrats, LRF and extension organisations) that need to increase their ability of self- and systems-critique. If one is not able to see the consequences for the whole system, it is easy to be a part of a development that does not create sustainability in the long run. We can take Lean Production Philosophy as an example. There are great expectations among certain actors if Lean is introduced in agricultural production systems. Even though Lean is quite far from approaching the farmers lifeworld, it will probably be of great help for many farmers in their strive to increase the efficiency and thereby also the profitability of the farm business. But what happens with the agricultural system as a whole? Since Lean does not create any surplus values as such, it will probably be yet another method that will keep the agricultural treadmill (c.f. Cochrane, 1958) rolling. We do not say that Lean is not to be introduced, but that it would be more fair also talking about the negative consequences that are to be followed for the agricultural system as a whole.

Recommendations for future initiatives

How might a possible fifth phase be designed in order to reverse the negative trend in Swedish agriculture? We would urge actors within the Swedish AKIS to make the next phase more cohesive and critical reflective in its character. As being one of the most influential and powerful

actors, we think that LRF should call for an open process where different actors, both within and outside the agricultural sector, would participate and learn from each other. The challenge that lies ahead is a truly collaborative/social learning experience where many actors and actions are taken on different levels – from finding the motives among individual farmers in their lifeworlds, to building a conducive policy environment as part of the Habermasian system. All actors need to improve their critical skills and reflect upon how each actor's *Weltanschauung* restricts them from seeing what is possible.

At advisory level we claim that farmers and advisors must engage in conversations that construct convergent interpretive horizons and more commensurable lifeworlds. The participants in an advisory situation have to enter each other's lifeworlds by co-participating in parallel discourses that deal with the products and processes of learning, and do so in democratic ways. Understanding another person's lifeworld is however not so much about a cognitive mutuality as it is about an emotional and embodied involvement. To be able to really understand another person – to walk in his/her shoes – demands both an engagement in that person's life and a capacity for empathy. Empathy is about entering the other person's lifeworld, rather than simply experiencing his or her immediate psychological state, which enables something qualitatively different to happen. Thus understanding and sharing another person's lifeworld is not about learning a method – ultimately it is about how we relate to other humans.

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