Recognising Choice: A Study of the Changing Politics of the Common Agricultural Policy through an Analysis of the MacSharry Reform Debate in Ireland and the Netherlands

In the study, the politics of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy is investigated on the basis of the concept of politics as an action, through an assessment of the construction of the political dimension in agricultural policy. This approach maintains that the politics of a policy reveals itself in the way choices are recognised, the way alternatives are articulated and what kinds of arguments are used. Shifts in emphasis in the CAP are examined, and the work also aims at contributing to an understanding of European integration and the role that the common policy for agriculture has in this.

The work includes a case study on the public debate in two member states, Ireland and the Netherlands, concerning the MacSharry reform, decided upon in July 1992. An analysis of the actors, themes and argumentation shows what interpretations and emphasis were possible and how these were reflected in the different constructions of agriculture and of the European reality. In the analysis different text analysis approaches were used: content analysis, analysis of discoursive fields, and an analysis based on the approach of new rhetoric.

The work concludes by envisaging a change in paradigm from an income policy for farmers towards a contract between society and agriculture. This would entail an increase in the number of relevant actors, and a shift in power among the existing ones. In addition, a broadening of politicised themes is discussed.

Avainsanat: European union - agricultural policy reforms - agricultural policy - Ireland - Netherlands MacSharry reform