

INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURAL ACTORS' INFORMATION GATHERING AND UTILIZATION PRACTICES IN THE SZEKLERLAND AREA¹

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Abstract

Our analysis aims at providing specialist information to support policy and planning work in Szeklerland that is focused on organizing specialist information dissemination programmes or events. Based on the research program carried out since 2011 by WAC – Center for Regional and Anthropological Research and Pro Agricultura Hargitae Universitas Foundation, we looked into 90 interviews with a view to examining the passages related to information acquisition, particularly statements, opinions, or references having to do with information acquisition. In keeping with the studied material, we would like to draw attention to two conclusions: (1) The adopted information acquisition practice indicates the dominance of the spot-like operating model, (2) Views taken on information sources indicate that the regional agricultural actors show preference for informal solutions in information acquisition and learning and even try to render formal, institutional solutions informal in their ways of resorting to them.

Keywords: innovative agricultural actors, information acquisition, Szeklerland

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1. Introduction

The significance of knowledge transfer directed towards the Szeklerland area and covering all segments of agriculture is in effect continually emphasized and the associated initiatives supported by sectoral, public, and policy stakeholders alike, while programmes providing a framework for knowledge transfer are positively assessed by the regional public. The relevance of agricultural knowledge transfer is justified by several factors. Some of our previous professional analyses (Biró 2016; Kovács 2017; Biró–Magyar 2017, 2018; Biró–Sárosi–Blága 2020) also concluded that the actors of the three main producer groups playing a key role in the region (operational farms and community associations, small-scale novel businesses representing social and agricultural innovation, self-sustaining family farms) are – in different ways and following different directions – claimants as well as participants of the knowledge transfer process, often in the form of individual practices. Participation in training and practical demonstration programmes, individual information gathering and relationship building, and the constantly increasing need for technical-technological change are all indicative of the importance of the knowledge transfer process. As a further argument for the significance of agricultural knowledge transfer, we can mention the extremely high proportion of regional households (over 50%) involved to a certain extent in agriculture, indicating that the regional role of the agricultural sector (employment, complementary source of livelihood, social practice assumed as community value) will most probably remain crucial in the medium term. The appreciation of rural areas (the increased role of endogenous conditions, the protection of environmental assets rising to prominence, stressing health considerations in terms of food consumption, the enhanced role of bottom-up processes in local development, local product movement, strengthening of the so-called amateur gardening movement) also underlines the role of knowledge transfer directed towards the region. Last but not least, we should mention as yet another argument the low level of regional knowledge production supporting the innovation processes of the agricultural segment and that the utilization of professional knowledge produced in the region is occasional and contingent.

A highly important element of knowledge transfer directed towards the rural – in our case semi-peripheral – area is linked to learning about innovative technologies as well as to regional adaptation. In the case of regions similar to

Szeklerland, the question of adopting modern technologies² also arises; however, it is also worth paying attention to the fact that due to the lack of modern machinery and the obsolescence of the existing one, for most of the regional agricultural actors, the technological innovation process is limited to the acquisition of mechanical apparatus and the replacement of old machines. Nevertheless, besides this aspect of technological innovation, all those questions come to the fore that – in relation to the adaptation of innovative technologies – the literature addressing the analysis of small-scale agricultural enterprises operated in the region calls attention to. These include factors such as the type of innovation, the socioeconomic characteristics of the enterprises embracing innovation, personal qualities of the smallholders, and, just as importantly, farmers' ideas about the future of their activity.³ Having said that, technological innovation is just one side of the knowledge transfer when it comes to the Szeklerland area. Bridging the gaps in basic professional knowledge necessary for performing agricultural activities can be regarded as one key substantive constituent of knowledge transfer, while the other one is the professional support provided by the constantly growing experimenting and initiating group whose members represent social and sectoral innovation at the same time through their activities and attitudes. They are producing goods never before considered by the regional farming communities and without any accumulated regional experience in their production/manufacturing. In addition, the adopted production technologies are an absolute novelty in the region, and, in fact, the entire entrepreneurial habitus is a novel element (for a detailed analysis of this target group, see Biró 2016: 17–19). The paper at hand deals with this group's information gathering practices, which count as a novelty on the regional scale and differ from the practices of self-

² In the framework of Pro Agricultura Hargitae Universitas Foundation, a separate research programme was conducted addressing the regional conditions of adopting digital technologies. For a professional summary of the results, see the book entitled *Digitális agrárium – székelyföldi innováció* [Digital Agriculture – Szeklerland Innovation] (Biró–Magyar 2019).

³ Concerning knowledge and technology transfer, the TORA model (for its description, see Garforth et al. 2004 and for its practical application Ambrosius et al. 2015) is highly informative in terms of the region under study. For a more detailed presentation of the model, see Ágnes Sárosi-Blága's study published in the present volume.

sustaining family farms or that of farm-like businesses. Considering that this group is the most open to obtaining information and the number of its members is on the rise, the content and form of their adopted modes of information acquisition is at all events appropriate to be taken into account when the professional planning of the knowledge transfer directed towards the area takes place.

Our analysis aims at providing specialist information to support such policy and planning work in this region that is focused on organizing specialist information dissemination programmes or events. Numerous forms of knowledge transfer and knowledge acquisition have developed on an occasional basis and spontaneously in the Szeklerland area over the past three decades. However, in the diverse framework of the originating institutions and professionals, of the programmes, training content, and individual as well as group learning methods, some sort of spontaneous “institutionalization” took place in the sense that certain information acquisition practices and methods have consolidated and become established (in smaller or larger circles). Although no regional-scale strategic concept or framework programme has taken shape as yet with regard to knowledge transfer directed towards the area, or, more specifically, to the organization and management of information acquisition, this kind of professional planning and programming will most probably become a future necessity. We believe that being aware of the spontaneously developed and established information acquisition practices in the region (dimension, substantive features, methods, utilization) could be a useful starting point for policy planning.

In the context of the analysis, we looked into 90 interviews with a view to examining the passages related to information acquisition, particularly statements, opinions, or references having to do with information acquisition. As a result, we have identified 276 passages falling into this category. We classified as specialist information or knowledge all content that was marked as such by the interview subjects partly in their answers to questions specifically related to this subject and partly in fragments connected with – but not in response to a direct question – the preparation of own activities and farm management.

Twelve types of information sources are mentioned altogether in these passages (the below list does not follow an order of evaluation or mention):

- recourse to the services of professionals working in the region (personal relationship);
- using the Internet on a general basis;

- Facebook or other social media websites;
- regional producers whom one knows and who are engaged in a similar activity;
- professional trainings/courses;
- specialized publications (books);
- gaining personal experience in the country or abroad;
- mobile phone applications;
- participation in exchange of expertise events;
- use of professional journals and periodicals;
- television programmes;
- radio programmes.

We can define four types of activities/processes regarding the modes of information acquisition. These are as follows:

- individual information acquisition,
- acquisition of professional knowledge in an institutional context (officially),
- knowledge gained through family socialization, and
- knowledge obtained by way of a service.

2. Information Acquisition: Sources and Modes

Reference to acquiring professional information supporting the economic activity comes to the fore in every interview, sometimes even more than once. Passages and explicit statements related to this activity can be analysed from several aspects such as according to the sources of information acquisition, the content of information, or the modes of obtaining information. In the course of the analysis, we took stock of the indicated information sources and also attempted grouping them according to the ways of information acquisition. Our research is exploratory in nature, and the types presented below are based on field experience.

The most common mode of obtaining information is the *individual type*. The characteristic feature of this kind of information acquisition is that the person performing the agricultural activity determines the source, time, duration, and content of the occasion of information acquisition. A typical example is gathering information via the Internet.

A significantly different mode of obtaining information is *institutionalized knowledge acquisition*. This is another situation when the person him-/herself chooses the source of information (a typical example is taking a course), but once the choice has been made, the person will adapt to a timeframe and programme developed independently of him/her, accept the content offers characteristic of the given programme, and take part in a didactic process developed independently of him/her. The third type can be characterized by a single, specific source of information: this is the case of the *family socialization process*, in the context of which the farmer adopts – as a child, youngster – to a greater or lesser extent, in the form of tacit knowledge the farming practice, mentality, and values specific to the given family. Just as importantly, a relevant role may be played by the knowledge acquisition mode within the scope of which the agricultural entrepreneur can make use of information sources as *services* accessible in institutionalized form (typical examples could be television programmes, newsletters). This is the case of specialized material that can be specifically categorized as information and that is purposefully made/displayed by the distributors for the social group of agricultural entrepreneurs. The practice of choosing between the various ways of information acquisition is a vital constituent of the regional knowledge context – a regular analysis of this topic could answer many questions that help us understand agricultural entrepreneurs' attitude towards knowledge acquisition. The following brief overview of our analysis results can serve merely as an introduction to the topic, its aim being to draw attention to the importance of a detailed analysis of this subject.

2.1 Individual Information Acquisition

The individual ways of obtaining information prevail in the studied target group. Forty-two point five percent of the examined statements can be categorized under this type. Over half of the information sources are connected to digital platforms (in general: Internet-based search; Facebook pages from among the community websites; to a lesser extent, known websites or webshops).

“I mainly get information from the Internet, and less commonly trade conferences, acquaintances, and professionals make up my sources of information.”

“It is in fact indispensable; if you have no access to the Internet, then you have no insight whatsoever, so you cannot really get along by yourself”.

“Products could be sold and promoted in the easiest way, only by using Facebook, which is also suitable for getting information.”

Sources of information relying on personal relationships have a similar importance to that of the digital platforms. In this context, the most crucial role is played by relationships that interview subjects build with agricultural entrepreneurs performing similar activities in the region. We must underline that these are not group or network connections but informal, partnership-based interpersonal relationships whose priority aspect is mutuality. A detailed analysis of these relationships will be addressed in the third chapter of our study. Although mentioned less frequently but still part of this category is personal information acquired in foreign environments.

“For the most part, I’ve gained the knowledge necessary for breeding from other livestock farmers, since I’ve come to realize that whatever I can find in books or on the Internet is useless because there’s a lot of information one needs in the breeding process, and I cannot get them but from breeders.”

“... I had the opportunity to travel to Switzerland with the support of the Gheorgheni Caritas. There I truly got myself acquainted with modern farming. Then it occurred to me that I should try something different at home too. It helped me most in getting started...”

Relationships developed with professionals in the region are mentioned considerably less often (16 times) – these can be understood as consultancy services, specialist–client relationships, or modes of information acquisition. In the majority of the cases, these also fall under the category of informal relationships, but in terms of information acquisition the difference emerging in the possession of professional knowledge renders such relationships asymmetrical and not exchange-based (see the relations developed with other entrepreneurs).

“I’ve got three-four such personal professional relationships in the subject of fruit tree care, currant, and raspberry, whom I can call right away to ask for guidance on specific matters, who can give advice, offer solutions. Usually these work best, and this means selfless professional help.”

2.2 Knowledge Acquisition in Institutional Context

Hardly a tenth of the innovative agricultural producers interviewed in the framework of the research series spanning several years now indicated to have acquired agricultural professional knowledge at university or in high school. Undoubtedly, prior institutional training constitutes an advantage in launching an individual business, but respondents always add that knowledge acquired in such context had to be later supplemented with a considerable amount of practical knowledge. Most of the innovative agricultural producers has no prior institutional professional training – for them, the various courses, specialist books, and professional programmes make up the context of obtaining normative, institutional, agricultural knowledge. Slightly over one third (34.4%) of the statements on information acquisition indicated the significance of an institutional context. In stating their views on information sources and acquisition, they always include positive opinions as well. The main reason for this is that the amount of their knowledge is insignificant compared to what they are offered in the context of learning opportunities. Thus, they have good reason to be under the impression that in such situations they learn or hear something they can put to good use, that every specialist book contains some helpful information. At the same time, knowing the training offers and practices in the region, it should also be pointed out that programmes provided in an institutional framework do not transfer knowledge in an amount that would have a material impact on the practice of agricultural entrepreneurs. It is because of two factors that institutional opportunities can be termed as information acquisition rather than learning situations. One of them has already been referred to above: the majority of those enrolling in training sessions base their activities on tacit knowledge and lack a professional grounding that would make it possible for them to acquire a great amount of explicit knowledge in the framework of the training programme. The other learning barrier is posed by the formal nature of organizing or making use of the trainings. The net result is that opinions are consistent regarding the overall perception of the training sessions (i.e. “they are essential”) and greatly differ when it comes to pointing out genuine utility. This situation gives rise to a training practice where the supply side is professionally well founded and of significant volume. The verification of knowledge transfer is formal or missing altogether. And the user can select from these offers in accordance with their own interests and can choose any content or amount suiting their needs.

“The courses were useful mostly because they gave me ideas, which have not necessarily been realized yet, but I’ve got them stored in my head, and I can put them into practice sometime in the future. This is the case of organic farming, for instance. And, indeed, I learned new things, but it was mostly beneficial because of the ideas...”

“... there are some who undergo a course only for the paper [certificate] and not to gain knowledge. By all means, since the Union [EU] supports the sector, and a certificate obtained at such a specialized training could be an application criterion; so, grants will be conditioned upon this, wherefore I consider this advisable.”

“I was encouraged that I should get this because, anyway, if you have a diploma, they look at you differently.”

Utilization of specialist books is mentioned by 20% of the interview subjects and only with the purpose of searching for information in support of solving the current problems. Ten percent of them mention exchange of experience taking place in an organized, institutional context, and the same proportion of respondents make mention of conferences and events as important opportunities for gaining information. Visual materials (instructional videos available on the Internet, professional presentation videos) are barely mentioned at all.

“When we started it, we read two books at first to get an idea of what we need to do exactly. We still have about five books; we took the first steps based on these.”

“In the beginning, I gathered information based on the books. I bought three books on stall equipment and milk production, and then I designed the stable by myself using the illustrations found there.”

Overall, we can say that opportunities for learning and information gathering taking place in an institutional framework are very similar in their structure and functionality to the individual ways of gathering information mentioned in the previous analysis section. The current needs of the user determine the form and content of participation. The modes of information acquisition are not aimed at

accumulating knowledge and are not intended, with a few exceptions, for the entrepreneurs to change or transform their farming practices upon obtaining such information. Their fundamental role is to act as information kept in reserve or as knowledge ready to be used right away in support of starting the already planned business, engaging in the established practice, or finding solutions to specific subproblems.

2.3 The Family Socialization Process

The group involved in the study produces agricultural products never before considered by families in the region, while the technology, toolkit, and economic positioning of farming is also different. Their activity is partly social innovation and partly – as compared to the self-sustaining family farming model still characteristic of the region – agricultural innovation. Having said that, numerous and diverse references are made to the importance of childhood socialization in their activity, even if as a child/youngster they were involved in farm work only to a minor extent. This socialization effect does not apply primarily to practical farming but much rather to certain aspects of ideology, values, and mentality. These include the appreciation of arable land or of domestic animals, the implicit ways of approach to natural-environmental values, certain components of farming behaviour, work ethic, and the like. At the same time, changes, the signs of deviation from the farming model that may be considered as traditional are also important (some typical examples are continuous learning, relationship building and relationship management, adoption of business thinking and practice, etc.). Based on the interview subjects' attitude, it appears that the family socialization environment generated considerable impact on the formation of farming habitus and not on technological farming knowledge. In all likelihood, this socialization effect contributes to the fact that the majority of the agricultural producers falling under this entrepreneurial type do not see progress made towards operational farm management as an objective to be achieved.

“I learned a lot from my parents and grandparents, even as a child I had a certain insight; if I think about it, one could say they were practising organic farming back then, did not use any chemicals, appreciated the land, the nature; this is what must be continued.”

“We don’t need professional knowledge because we have gained so much expertise throughout the 36 years that is more than enough. So, I don’t need any university or school as I’ve already graduated from the school of life at home.”

“I was born into this life. Back then, I used to say that I did not want to do that, exactly because it required so much effort, but they drummed it into me, so to say, against my own will, and it turned into a passion after all.”

2.4 Use of Information Services

Barely 10% of the statements on information acquisition indicate that agricultural producers attach importance to any kind of information service in the region. Responses vary considerably within this – the approx. two dozens of references are split up between several information sources: professional organizations and groups, professional journals, television and radio programmes, specialist newsletters, and mobile phone applications. Also, opinions connected to the individual sources are ambivalent in most of the cases. As we have indicated in more detail in the first study of the publication, there is a low number of institutional fora in the region that are regularly involved in thematization associated with the agricultural sector, and even part of these are focused on the presentation of the achieved development results. Regional-scale, regularly operating professional information services are yet to be developed, and the individual initiatives are aimed at smaller areas or specific target groups. It should also be mentioned that the greater portion of the Romanian-language information content distributed on a national scale does not make its way into this area of compact Hungarian population, and the use of channels conveying such information content is not specific to the regional population in general. Our experience indicates, however, that what appears even more important is that the individual ways of information acquisition are prioritized and institutional services do not respond to the regional cultural patterns supporting individual and informal information acquisition. The situation at hand may offer an explanation also for the regional initiatives of information dissemination adopted in recent times not having proved to be lasting or successful. Although the interview texts include very few reflections on services, the following examples give a good indication of the basic pattern of the attitude towards these information sources.

“Newspapers are not so useful; there are some extensive articles in the spring or summer, on a seasonal basis, but I don’t think there are concrete pieces of information on a specific plant or cultivation technique. Newspaper articles contain mostly general information that are more interesting than useful.”

“I don’t really watch TV, not often anyway. The downside of TV is that it’s not interactive; one must watch whatever is being broadcast.”

“Radio is good; the agricultural programmes of Marosvásárhelyi Rádió [Radio Târgu-Mureş] are good. There are concrete questions, usually such that concern a lot of people. They have a programme on Tuesdays and perhaps on Wednesdays too, you can even listen back to it; they have many useful short questions and answers. And always appropriate for the season at that.”

“Such newsletters are still very much alive. (...) I receive them in electronic format, but I only glance through the titles. Grants [/subsidies] make up the major topic there. Hungarian-language newsletters never make it to me. I don’t even really like newsletters; whenever I need some information, I look for it myself.”

“One can get informed from newspapers too, but if you wish to learn about something specific, there’s very little chance that the very issue of the newspaper you’re buying will give you the exact answer you’re looking for.”

* * *

If based on the interview texts we are to analyse entrepreneurs’ position on what the acquired knowledge is suitable for and how it can be employed in everyday farming practice, then we can define four large areas of utilization.

Knowledge Acquisition with a View to Solving Current Issues

In the case at hand, individual information acquisition plays a crucial role. The most essential sources are digital platforms and personal relationships with farmers engaged in a similar activity in the region. Closely linked to this is seeking advice

from professionals, but with a much lower frequency, as we have seen it. Institutionalized learning is given a limited role here. The speed of information acquisition as well as the issues of reliability and authenticity are key aspects. In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, this latter criterion is not linked to institutional or professional authority but to personal and informal relationships.

Broadening of General Knowledge on the Grounds That One Will Probably Find Some Use for It

Interview subjects stress very often that every item of specialist information is essential even if its utilization is not on their immediate agenda. In their opinion, it is always worthwhile to keep informed, keep an eye out, take part in events, and attend presentations since “one can never know where one can hear something important” or “even if it’s not needed right now, it might come in handy later”. Each and every mode of information acquisition and all 12 information sources may be important (services have a lesser role) as one may never know where a farmer can pick up some information that will turn out to be useful for him/her. This attitude is one of the reasons for taking part in organized programmes, being present on social media platforms, and occasionally listening to radio and watching television. This attitude and practice of randomness and of virtually constant “alertness” may be the justification for the fact that among the ways of learning, individual solutions override institutional forms of learning in the region. If that is the case, this attitude must necessarily be considered when designing the regional knowledge transfer process (which is expected to incline towards institutional forms of information acquisition, based on the professional attitudes observed in the region).

Information Acquisition with a View to Completing a Purposeful, Programmatic Learning Activity/Event (E.g.: Course)

Programmatic (regular, taking place in an institutional context) information acquisition has two major areas of utilization. One of them is acquiring knowledge required for establishing or launching an individual enterprise. A typical example is learning content that is underrepresented in the region (see: organic farming) or that is administrative in nature (see: accounting expertise, preparation/compilation of grant applications/tenders). The other, more widely encountered area of

utilization is obtaining formal qualification necessary for the registration or operation of a company (e.g. business licence allowing application for grants). For now, digital platforms play a marginal role in this area, institutionalized knowledge acquisition (accredited adult education programmes or occasional thematic courses, presentations) being the prevalent element.

Information Acquisition with a View to Reinforcing the Individual Entrepreneurial Habitus

While it may appear surprising, besides professional and efficient farm management, the development, representation, and acceptance of their own habitus proves to be of pivotal importance for members of the studied group. This may be related to the fact that a particular business is an innovation in the local environment but also that certain principles, convictions, and ideologies (environment protection, utilization of local values, producing healthy products) may be linked to the chosen content or mode of farming. They attach importance to content/forms of gathering information that justify or reinforce their own habitus. One of its dimensions is reference made to specific elements of family socialization, especially with respect to values, work ethic, and mentality. However, the most important issues for them in this regard are personal relationship with others engaged in a similar activity in the region and digital platforms to some extent (similar initiatives existing in other social environments or fora assuming the goals and values of this type of farming). The development and reinforcement of the farmer's habitus is almost exclusively the result of knowledge acquired through individual/personal relationships. Services are involved here to a substantially limited degree.

3. Conclusions

In keeping with the studied material, we would like to draw attention to two conclusions. We must emphasize that the present research was carried out based on the target group of innovative farmers, and so it can be expected that should we extend information acquisition and training to the much larger group of non-innovative farmers, we might gain partly different experiences and partly experiences reinforcing what have been stated here.

3.1

The adopted information acquisition practice indicates the dominance of the spot-like operating model. There are two possible reasons for this.

- One major reason may be the low number of innovative agricultural entrepreneurs in the region – one can encounter only one or two such initiatives per settlement. Spatial distances between the locations of enterprises and physical insularity render the operating models (and, within that, the given information acquisition practice) unique. Needless to say, communication opportunities can now make it much easier to overcome physical distances; in principle, frequent interaction between two actors sharing the same interest but being far apart is conceivable. As we could see from the analysis, these relationships develop over time, actors engaged in the same or similar activities find and (get to) know each other, and should they come up against some difficulty in the course of their farming operations, they often help out each other without any selfish motive. All the same, no such networking contexts and models of (professional or personal) convergence are developed that would go beyond the exchange of information that is essential just at the moment. This could imply that besides physical distance there are other reasons underlying the dominance of the insular operating model also reflected in information acquisition.
- We formulate it as a mere assumption that the innovative agricultural entrepreneurs' habitus might account for the phenomenon of insularity; the habitus that – ambivalently – operates side by side openness, the need for developing both intra- and extra-regional relationships on the one hand and the attitude that – as some sort of regional tradition – favours the pursuit of uniqueness and independence besides the structural similarity with other actors on the other hand. Certainly, the above remark on the ambivalent nature of attitude calls for further detailed investigations, but it also indicates that the attitudes of learning, acquiring knowledge, and receiving information are embedded into regional social patterns, and all actors engaged in developing professional consultancy systems and organizing knowledge transfer processes directed towards the region should take these regional

features into account. With regard to further planning, it also seems reasonable to consider that the analysis at hand is focused on the innovative entrepreneurial group, which is more open to changes, and that even this cluster appears to be heavily influenced by the behaviour patterns traditionally characteristic of the region. And, supposedly, this effect can be felt more intensely in the case of the self-sustaining family farms making up the majority of the agricultural sector in the area, which, in turn, can also be addressed as the target group of training and information acquisition activity.

3.2

Views taken on information sources indicate that the regional agricultural actors show preference for informal solutions in information acquisition and learning and even try to render formal, institutional solutions informal in their ways of resorting to them.⁴ In this context, regional actors view the acquisition of specialized knowledge – be it a formal training framework or occasional information gathering – as an activity that requires stepping out of the “world” known/felt as their own. Learning as well as information gathering qualify as an administrative process during which they need to interact with external, superior, or foreign (not part of their own world) actors or situations. Informal administration consists in pursuing one’s own interest and logic in a specific situation, in a given moment. The informal model of information acquisition and learning accepts the authority of the information source, of the specialized knowledge (or of the person or institution representing it) exclusively at the level of the momentarily demonstrated behaviour, in the context of and during the interaction. Its objective is to select the item of knowledge that is currently important to it (or the item that it views as potentially useful in the future). Concerning the situation, institution, or person of information and knowledge acquisition, it activates attitudes of distancing rather than that of identification. It is no coincidence that interview subjects present their information acquisition and learning “results” of a predominantly personal nature as their own

⁴ On the role of informal strategies and practices as well as on the post-1989 patterns of persistence of these strategies in the post-socialist region, see: Dani–Vigvári 2019. The analysis of the informal practices adopted in the area under study is still an ongoing process.

achievements that they are proud of, that they look upon as their personal merit or accomplishment. In such narratives, one can clearly notice the phenomenon that, in association with the operation of informal strategies – and in reference to the identity-forming role of such procedures –, Nicolette Makovicky (2018) calls “the poetics of self”. The promotion of informal strategies in the area under investigation is far from being limited to information acquisition and learning processes, this type of practices having played a crucial role for several decades (their description would exceed the scope of the present study). In terms of our topic, however, this represents a highly important aspect. The predominance of informal strategies in the information acquisition and learning processes may constitute a major obstacle to any professional programme that has in view the long-term institutionalization, outside the educational institutions considered as official (universities, high schools), of agricultural innovation knowledge transfer directed towards the region. Placing this in the context of professional consultancy practice, it could also suggest that the only form of operation with a valid potential in the region is that which will be capable of linking the major components of the currently existing personalized and informal practice with the institutional frameworks to be developed.

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