

1. Title

What is the role of animal welfare NGOs in farm animal welfare governance in Poland?

2. Research area

Farm animal welfare governance

3. Purpose

In recent years, farm animal welfare (FAW) has become a central feature of debates at European level. Therefore, various outcomes of action can be observed, particularly within the interpretation and implementation of the EU Directives among member states. As a result of social concerns about the lack of appropriate national FAW legislation, an increasing number of NGOs have gradually found their way into public debates. This development can be illustrated by governance, a shift from the delivery-only government to more autonomous societies. Therefore, by examining differences in NGO contributions to changes in national legislation and – particularly – in market differentiation in the UK and Poland, this presentation argues that NGO activity, consumer attitudes, and supermarket policy are interdependent and influence each other. Consequently, they illustrate FAW governance, a development unique for each EU member state, but one left unexplored in states such as Poland.

Its uniqueness stems from the level of NGO engagement with various stakeholders, which is in turn interdependent with citizen attitudes towards farm animal welfare. An examination of the European attitudes reveals significant differences between long-time and short-time members, particularly in the case of the United Kingdom and Poland. Therefore, these states form two case studies of FAW governance, providing an excellent platform for exploring differences in NGO activity in the so-called ‘new’ and ‘old’ EU member states. However, EU Directives lack species-specific regulations and as a result, one farmed animal is severely omitted – fish. Consequently, this presentation focuses on how British and Polish NGOs improve fish welfare.

4. Theoretical background

This presentation adapts and extends the theory of the civilizing process and associated with it concept of social figurations, in order to analyse trends in perception of animal welfare, as well as in improvement of the European legislation. Farm animal welfare issues are embedded in multiple social settings and networks of interdependence – what in my thesis is called ‘figurations’. Building on the work of Norbert Elias, a figurational sociologist, this project aims to set the base for a better understanding of the social relations, interdependencies, and power structures that shape the animal

civilizing process and farm animal welfare governance. The figurational approach is thus applied in examining the concept of ethical complex, which allows for exploration of power relations between NGOs, citizens, governments, and retailers within governance movements. On this basis, the presentation redefines the concept of ethical complex as a figuration, in which the actors who take part in improving farm animal welfare are closely interdependent within their social networks.

5. Methodology

Figurational sociology provides a fruitful platform to analyse the social and political relations between NGOs, consumers, and retailers. It does so by building on the notion of figurations and by discussing the viability of method in this sense. The reason for this is that Elias attempted to develop sociology as an individual discipline, one that does not mimic philosophy. Therefore, by analysing issues relating to knowledge and the sciences in a more 'sociological' rather than 'philosophical' manner, he sought to create notions distant from philosophy's influence by ridding himself of the traditional meaning of methodology. He saw it as problematic because methodology in a conventional sense referred to certain 'timeless standards' which were used as markers for research validity, but at the same time such approach hindered the exploration of knowledge that stems from reality – or 'reality-congruent knowledge'.

For this reason, the research strategy follows the figurational approach by using it to clarify that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is a 'false dichotomy', as much as is relying on either testing the theory or generating it. Therefore, to achieve 'reality-congruent knowledge' in my thesis by following the figuration perspective, I am attempting to gain an understanding of the issues researched, rather than discuss the methods used for research. Therefore, I started collecting data through unstructured interviews with non-governmental organisation and businesses, because this tool is possibly the most fruitful in gaining information about NGO-retailer relations within their complex figuration. All interviews have been and will be conducted online, due to the difficulties of arranging face-to-face appointments in the light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, to further understand the dynamic interdependences between NGOs, retailers, and consumers, I am conducting online questionnaires among Polish and British consumers.

6. Main findings

During the interviews, a certain theme emerged: that the NGOs tend to target or form partnerships with certain supermarkets. Those usually boast the highest number of consumers, which equals the influence that businesses have over their customers. For NGOs it provides a viable reason

to reach out to the supermarkets whose impact on farm animal welfare seems to be the highest and is directly connected to their public relations image.

The initial survey analysis shows that the British consumers are not only more convinced that all farm animals, including fish, are sentient beings, but also that they are willing to pay more for 'animal-friendly' products and 'sustainably sourced' fish than the Polish. These results are not final but give an indication of why NGOs approach businesses and consumers in the way they do. For example, the British NGOs tend to form partnerships while the aim in Poland is to involve consumers in action against the retailers.

7. Potential contributions

The main contributions include investigations into farm animal welfare governance in Poland to further understand how and in what ways fish welfare is improved, particularly in comparison to other EU states. This presentation will provide an understanding of the ways in which different NGOs address the issue of fish welfare through an exploration of NGO relations with other stakeholders, such as retailers, producers, and consumers. By considering data collected and analysed thus far, this presentation will eventually assess the role of animal welfare NGOs in governance movements in Poland.

8. Keywords

Farm animal welfare governance, NGOs, market welfare models, ethical complex.