

The Significance of Domain Names for Agribusiness – Czech and Austrian comparative study

Radka MacGregor Pelikánová

CULS Prague, Faculty of Economics and Management, Department of Law, Kamýcká 129, 165 21 Prague 6 - Suchbát, Czech Republic

radkamacgregor@yahoo.com

Annotation: The second half of the 20th century brought about a new perception of Agribusiness, an emergence and bustling development of information systems and information technologies (“IS-IT”) and a modern stage of European integration. Internet domain names as an IS-IT representative have a significance for the EU business *par excellence*, the Agribusiness. They can perform a myriad of functions and impact Agribusiness. How real is this potential and to what extent and with which intensity is it realized to increase the efficiency of Czech and Austrian Agribusinesses? A study of this IS-IT economic and legal sphere is completed by the investigation and comparison of the employment of domain names registered and used by rather homogenous Czech and Austrian Agribusiness subjects, organic farmers. Three sets of data were researched and explored. Secondary data about domain names and Agribusiness were scrutinized, a search of TLDs databases of Registry Operators, Whois, etc. was performed, and the inconsistencies between these data were addressed by inquiries. The potential functions and importance of domain names for Agribusiness was confirmed and a forensic and target quantitative assessment of Czech and Austrian Agribusiness domain names was conducted along with partial qualitative multi-disciplinary remarks from areas linguistic, economics, etc. Their comparison and evaluation relied on induction and on feedback earned based on direct inquiries of selected subjects. A new perspective regarding the underestimated potential of domain names and Agribusiness is offered. EU, Czech and Austrian policies share the same conceptual tenor, but the contextual and multidisciplinary analysis with a complementary inquiry and ad hoc investigations suggests an information gap, and especially Czech farmer’s reduced awareness about the significance of domain names for Agribusiness allowing speculation. Further study needs to be done to reverse this trend.

Key words: Agribusiness, Domain name, Europe 2020, Internet, Website.

JEL classification: M15, Q13, Q16, R11

1 Introduction

The post-modern global society is significantly virtualized and dematerialized. The Internet dramatically influences the professional, as well as the social and private life of a tremendous number of subjects, including those from the EU. The Internet’s appropriate use is critical for European integration, especially if e-platforms such as Websites are used. The new strategy launched in the EU in 2010 for the new decade (“Europe 2020”) underlines the vital importance of the talent and creativity of Europeans leading to innovations and a high quality agricultural sector (EC, 2010). Times of passive and backwards farmers producing “just in case” overwhelming lakes of milk and mountains of butter are definitely gone, and the modern Common Agricultural Policy (“CAP”) has two strong pillars, production and regional development, and serves many purposes going far beyond the simple generating and providing of food. Anachronistic stereotypes are a poor basis for future policy strategies (Copus, 2014). Objectives and goals of both pillars can be met only if an effective and efficient use of modern instruments is performed by all stakeholders, and especially the disadvantaged ones. Despite all European integration efforts, large disparities still remain across different parts of the EU (Copus et al, 2008) and the Internet function can critically help to reduce these

gaps at modest costs. The post-Lisbon EU needs pro-active Europeans working effectively and efficiently, and the genuine engagement of all stakeholders needs to go even beyond the principle of shared management (Peters and Gregory, 2014). The Internet can be a great vehicle for it, especially via a well-used and visited Website (MacGregor, 2013). There are key 2 options to attract to an e-presentation on a Website – by a volatile search engine optimization (“SEO”) mechanism and by the mechanism of selection of appropriate domain names. The last mentioned is at the heart of this comparative study paper.

Czech and Austrian organic farmers, aka Biofarmers, generally have ready access to the Internet. They are rather a homogenous group, a group which is aware that a Website is a set of related and connected Webpages, that all publicly accessible Website collectives constitute the World Wide Web (Köhler and Arntd, 2011) and that each Website is attached to a domain carrying a domain name (MacGregor, 2012). A Czech or Austrian organic farmer can get access to appropriate servers, register his own domain, label it with an attractive domain name with a tree structure (Sonntag, 2006) and attach to it a system of interlinked hypertext documents, in short, Websites (Cvik and MacGregor, 2014), so as to become visible in the cyber-world and consequently in the real world. Great domain names and Websites increase the interest of the public, and ultimately the competitiveness of farms and farmers (Šmejkalová, 2013). Czech and Austrian Biofarmes are subjects of EU law and policies, and have a choice of whether or not to take advantage of domain names, to boost their agri-activities and further advance the CAP and Europe 2020. They are free to take just a partial advantage of it, or even to completely decline this opportunity. Being an organic farmer does not mean being an Internet expert, indeed an important asymmetry of information exists (MacGregor, 2014c) and since no guidance is provided, farmers are left on their own. Thus, the objective of the paper is to check the perception of Internet domains and domain names by Austrian and Czech Biofarmers, in particular based on a trio of data sets to find whether they take advantage of domains names and common domains aimed toward the support of their Agribusiness, and whether the current status quo matches with official EU strategies.

2 Materials and Methods

This paper represents one stage of a large strategic search about the significance of domain names, and thus is a continuation of a set of papers published within the last 12 months (MacGregor, 2014b). It is an attempt to reach practical semi-conclusions related to case studies about the meaning and use of domain names for Agribusiness (Cvik and MacGregor, 2014). There are various metrics and criteria to select the “ideal” domain name (Huber and Hitzelberg, 2010) for posting the “ideal” Website. Basically, three domain name choice strategies are available – generic descriptive term for industry, name of producer, and trademark of producer (Salomon, 2012) and for the organic Agribusiness the first one seems highly relevant. This comparative study relies on an attractiveness predisposition of domain names that strongly suggests the topic *organic farming* or *biofarming*, as the generally perceived advantage over conventional Agribusiness, in the Czech Republic and in Austria, and checks its real status. A triad of sources and approaches and methods was selected of a primary, as well as secondary nature – research, identification and reviews of published data (i), researching pre-selected domain names and their registration status (ii) and assessing their employment and the general appearance of attached Websites (iii). All collected data and information will be evaluated, based on quantitative analysis with an ad hoc qualitative complementing, and will be re-assessed in a comparative manner.

The yielded-up sum of various data will be processed via Meta-Analysis (Schmidt and Hunter, 2014) in order to reconcile them and imply the confirmation or rejection of the key hypothesis. The abundance of both the functions and potential of domain names for business, including agribusiness in Central Europe, is, in the light of published data as well as based on practical observation, obvious. However, to what extent, and to what intensity is this reflected by the praxis?

A forensic and targeted quantitative assessment of pre-selected descriptive Czech and Austrian Agribusiness domain names was conducted, along with partial qualitative multi-disciplinary remarks from the field of linguistics, economics, etc. Their comparison and evaluation relied on induction and on feedback earned, based on direct inquiries of selected subjects. "Ideal" domain names, according to academic findings (Huber and Hitzelberg, 2010), were projected to a rather homogenous sector of the organic Agribusiness, i.e. 20 domain names highly suggesting *organic* and *biofarming* were identified. Based on findings about top level domain appropriateness (MacGregor, 2014b), these domain names were assigned to national top level domains, i.e. TLD .cz and TLD .at. An investigation within WHOIS and the national registry for TLD .cz and TLD .at was performed and cross-examined by a direct access to pertinent Websites. This battery of processes provided static conclusive information about the real use of these domain names within the restricted sample. Academic sources suggest that these prime domain names should be used vigorously by the organic farmers to boost their agribusiness. This is the hypothesis to work on it, explore and confirm or reject it.

3 Results and Discussion

The EU agriculture needs to attain higher levels of production of safe and quality food, while preserving the natural resources that agricultural productivity depends upon, and this can be done exclusively in a competitive and viable agricultural sector operating within a properly functioning supply chain, and which contributes to the maintenance of a thriving rural economy (EC, 2013). Neither the EU law, nor national Czech nor national Austrian law, orders organic farmers to register domain names identified by academic and other professional conclusions as ideal for Agribusiness, and to use them in compliance with both pillars of modern CAP. Similarly, no real public boosting or support is provided, and thus Czech and Austrian organic farmers are left on their own. A set of direct inquiries of organic farmers conducted recently obtained an absolutely clear message – "Yes, we have a domain name and Website and they are important for our agribusiness and nobody helped us with their setting and we would like very much to get assistance" (Cvik and MacGregor, 2014). Seeing EU proclamations (EC, 2013) as well as a well-established interrelation between naming and business success (Charette and Hooker, 2015), it seems unbelievable that no guidelines are offered to farmers for registering domain names. The registration and maintenance of domain names is simple, costing between EUR 5 and 50 (MacGregor, 2014b), i.e. an important strategic instrument can be obtained easily and cheaply, provided a right choice is made and is rightly processed. Despite the lack of free external help, the majority of Czech and Austrian organic farmers go for domain names (Asociace, 2013). They either hire a paid expert or, more commonly, they do it by themselves (Cvik and MacGregor, 2014).

Domain names directly suggesting *organic farming* and *biofarming*, and registered within TLD .cz and TLD .at should be definitely "in" and used ideally by the entire community of national organic farmers satisfying standards and expectations linked to *biofarming*, or perhaps by the

top organic farms in the country. The domain names selected for this study slightly deviate due to linguistic reasons. The search regarding their registration status was performed by using official Internet domain name system (“DNS”) resources – global WHOIS, <http://www.whois.com/whois/>, and national registries, i.e. the Czech TLD Registry CZ.Nic <http://www.nic.cz/> and the Austrian TLD Registry AT.Nic <https://www.nic.at/index/>.

Firstly, there was performed the search regarding the pre-selected ideal domain names referring to biofarming within TLD .cz. The resulting yields from WHOIS and CZ.Nic were identical and as indicated in Table 1.

The hypothesis that Czech organic farmers register and use prime domain names suggesting biofarming is, preliminarily based on the tested sample, rejected. Of the 12 pre-selected domain names, only one is truly used for Agribusiness, and at least four are held by individuals for speculative reasons. The only biofarming domain is registered and used exclusively for individual Agribusiness, i.e. for a single organic farm, Biofarm Sasov of Josef Sklenář. Mr. Sklenář beat the crowd, with a priority for over one decade (registration since 2003) and deserves some applause. An extremely low awareness and/or contradiction between academic findings and real life exists in this sphere. To contrast these results, an interview was conducted with a successful organic farmer family Doležalovi operating “bio” Agribusiness on their Křížové pole farm at the Czech-Austrian border, in Vyšší Brod. They confirmed a heavy reliance on their Website at <http://www.farmadolezal.cz/> and indicated that their Agri-tourism line depends directly upon the Website, while their selling product line depends indirectly. Their Website shows customer friendliness and the identity challenge, i.e. dealing with an unwelcome intrusion in their farm integrity (Di Domenico and Miller, 2012).

Table 1. “Bio-farm/er” Domain Names with URL within the Czech TLD .cz

Domain name with URL	Registrant /Use
http://bioczech.cz/	Milan Vacek – shopping, not related to organic farming...
http://bio-czech.cz/	NOT registered
http://biofarma.cz/	Josef Sklenář, Biofarm Sasov, Jihlava – individual Agribusiness
http://bio-farma.cz/	NOT registered
http://biofarmer.cz/	WEBMINT s.r.o., Prague – for sale
http://bio-farmer.cz/	Jiří Mareš, NEO, Lanškroun – advertising, speculation
http://ecofarma.cz/	Oldřich Migel - speculation
http://ekofarma.cz/	Karel Kladívko, Farma Svojiše – not yet Website
http://organicfarm.cz/	František Fiala – for sale, speculation
http://organic-farm.cz/	Václav Silovský – speculation, Website not attached
http://organicfarmer.cz/	NOT registered
http://organic-farmer.cz/	NOT registered
Summary: 17% Agribusiness, 33% not registered, 42% sale/speculation, 8% general e-shop	

Source: Own processing

Secondly, the search was performed about the pre-selected domain names referring to organic farming within TLD .at. Results yield from AT.Nic were completed by WHOIS, see Table 2.

The hypothesis that Austrian Biofarmers register and use prime domain names suggesting biofarming, is, based on the limited sample, preliminarily rejected. Of the 12 pre-selected domain names, only three are supporting the Agribusiness, two in a collective manner and thus boosting SMEs innovative sustainable synergy (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010) and one in an individual manner. Generally, the result is slightly better than in the case

of Czech organic farmers, nevertheless still the praxis seems to be very remote from academic studies.

Table 2. "Bio-farm/er" Domain Names with URL within the AustrianTLD .at

Domain name with URL	Registrant /Use
http://bioaustria.at/	<u>Ulses GmbH – Website under construction</u>
http://bio-austria.at/	<u>Bio Austria Verein – collective Agribusiness</u>
http://biofarm.at/	<u>Webscan KEG, Klagenfurt – collective Agribusiness Webhosting</u>
http://bio-farm.at/	<u>NOT registered</u>
http://biofarmer.at/	<u>Franz Weiss, Fischamend - not accessible/operational Website</u>
http://bio-farmer.at/	<u>BIJA, Slovenia – not accessible/operational Website</u>
http://organicfarm.at/	<u>Arne Pastor – individual Agribusiness</u>
http://organic-farm.at/	<u>Klaus Berghold, not Website</u>
http://organicbauer.at/	<u>NOT registered, item http://organiclandwirt.at/</u>
http://organic-bauer.at/	<u>NOT registered, item http://organic-landwirt.at/</u>
Summary: 17% Agribusiness, 42% not registered, 33% unknown, 8% Webhosting	

Source: Own processing

The previously expressed concern regarding the varied level of innovative activity as the consequence of regional heterogeneity (Copus, 2008) and regarding the lack of more centralized action on the EU level (MacGregor, 2014a) might be among the reasons why the hypothesis was not confirmed, i.e. why ideal domain names for organic farmers are not ideally used. Naturally, some further research needs to be done and the entire myriad of reasons must be identified and addressed, in order to reach the necessary correction of this deplorable situation. Nevertheless, it is critical to keep in mind the already established facts – domain names are significant and serve many functions (MacGregor, 2014b), the test for the selection of an ideal domain name is a balancing test (Salomon, 2012) with a strong factor of wording referring to the industry or goods or services, and the public has a reasonable knowledge about domain names and their significance, although an asymmetry of information is omnipresent (MacGregor, 2014c). Regarding organic farmers in the Czech Republic and in Austria, it seems that the information gap is even larger. They clearly proclaimed the importance of domain names and go ahead and register them (Cvik and MacGregor, 2014) rather randomly and intuitively, perhaps relying excessively on the SEO. Such reliance without knowing webmastering techniques in the Agribusiness context is ill-placed (Carmona et al, 2012). The best domain names for organic farmers with the highest potential to meet the abundance of expectations, as selected by secondary data conclusions, are not registered at all or registered by speculators. Other industries do not demonstrate such disparities, and often the top domain names according to academia are as well sold for the highest prices (Huber and Dingeldey, 2004). However, regarding organic farming, we have this bizarre situation, which, in light of Europe 2020, is not acceptable.

Austrian and Czech organic farmers belong to the large majority of the Czech (and Austrian) SMEs which have registered a domain name and have been actively using their own Websites (Asociace, 2013), but based on the selected comparison it seems that they go their intuitive way. Their perception of domain names seems, based on the tested sample, impaired, by Czech farmers even more than by Austrian. Prime domain names strongly suggesting organic farming remain often not registered, or more sadly, registered by Czech speculators. Hence the potential of domain names to boost the efficiency of Agribusiness seems underused. A further research should be done, to cover a larger spectrum of domain names used by farmers, to address the suggested disharmony and insufficiency of their awareness about

the domain name potential for their Agribusiness efficiency, and to help farmers with e-business.

4 Conclusion

The agriculture sector has been, for over fifty years, at the core of the EU's attention, including the most pro-integration duo engine, the European Commission and the Court of Justice (Burley and Mattli, 1993). The post-Lisbon EU wants to get closer to its citizens, and Europe 2020 wants them to be more effective and efficient while recognizing the importance of sustainable development and of innovations (EC, 2010). The Czech and Austrian policies are generally in compliance with these EU strategies, including the recent project of the European Network for Rural Development and National Rural Network with interlinked e-platforms with domain names and Websites (MacGregor, 2014a). The effectiveness is recognized, but the efficiency in the realization is weak, even on the state level, see eagri.cz.

The performed field search involving a restricted sample of Austrian and Czech organic farmers' domain names leads, due to the homogenous feature, to preliminary conclusions. Firstly, Austrian, and more so Czech, farmers miss the attraction capacity of descriptive domain names, which is, along with a SEO mechanism, critical for boosting e-presence and efficiency in general, and leaves these prime names to Czech speculators. Secondly, Austrian farmers benefit by common domains supporting their Agribusiness efficiency, while Czech farmers don't exhibit such a common drive and work for themselves. Recently, the European Commission published a press release about the adoption of 24 rural development programmes to boost EU farming, providing funds to states in order to modernize farms, help young farmers and improve management and infrastructure (EC, 2015), while directly mentioning the Czech Republic (but not Austria). Sadly, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Central Europe Agribusiness via practical IS/IT projects was ignored. There is a clear misbalance of information and a reduced awareness by farmers. A more extensive search should be done to study these deficiencies, to find instruments to improve the current status and to help Czech and Austrian farmers increase the efficiency of their Agri-activities by making their e-presence attractive and supporting their qualitative and quantitative growth.

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