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# WHAT IS AGRARIAN GOVERNANCE AND HOW TO ASSESS HOW GOOD IT IS?<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

There are huge differences in understandings and assessments of agrarian governance among scholars, practitioners, and official and business documents. The goal of the article is to adapt the interdisciplinary methodology of the New Institutional Economics and to propose an adequate definition and framework for analyzing the system of agrarian governance. Based on a critical review of previous research and practical experience in this area, it is underlined that agrarian governance is to be studied as a complex system, including four principle components: agrarian and related agents involved in making management decisions; rules, forms and mechanisms that govern the behavior, activities and relationships of agrarian agents; processes and activities related to making governing decisions; a specific social order resulting from the governing process and functioning of the system.

The holistic framework for assessing the quality of agrarian governance is suggested consisting of adequate good governance principles, aspects, indicators and criteria. Initial evaluation of the level of agrarian governance found out that it is at moderate level having in mind the EU perspective. The highest performance is attained under the principles of Equity and Solidarity and the Good Working Public Sector while in terms of the Working Private Sector and the Stakeholders Involvements it is the lowest.

**Key words:** governance, agriculture, definition, assessment, Bulgaria

## Introduction

The term Agrarian Governance is widely used in official documents, management practice, and in numerous academic publications around the globe and Bulgaria (Ali, 2015; Backer, 2011; Bachev, 2010, 2014; Bayyurt et al., 2015; Bevir, 2012; Bloor, 2022; Boevski, 2020; Braun and Birner, 2017; Carbone, 2017; Chakrabarti, 2021; Chhotray and Stoker, 2009; Darjaven Vestnik, 2021; Dimitrov et al., 2014; Dixit, 2016; DFID, 2010 ; EC, 2019, 2021; Frija et al., 2021; Freidberg, 2019; Fukuyama, 2016; Ganey et al., 2020; Georgiev, 2013; German, 2018; Higgins and Lawrence, 2005; Herrfahrdth, 2006; Katsamunska, 2016 ; Kumar and Sharma, 2020; Ledger, 2016; Levi-Four, 2012; Muluneh, 2021; Morfi, 2020; OECD, 2015, 2019; Planas et al, 2022; Schwindenhammer, 2018; Rodorff et al., 2019; Shand, 2018; Terziev et al., 2018; Tleubayev et

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al., 2021; Torres-Salcido and Sanz-Cañada, 2018; Vymětal, 2007; UN, 2015; Weiss, 2000; World Bank, 2022). The significant academic, public and private interest in the study of the governance system is dictated by the fact that the effectiveness of the specific governance system ultimately (pre)determines the degree of achievement of the diverse goals and the type of socio-economic development of a given country, industry, region, community, ecosystem, economic organization, etc. (Ostrom and Schlüter, 2007; Ostrom, 1999; North, 1990; Williamson, 1998, 2005). The relevance of the problem is also strengthened by the numerous examples of "failure" of the existing governance system on a sectoral, national, and international scale, the major socio-economic and ecological challenges and "crises" of various types, and the strong social "pressure" towards and drive by government, professional and business organizations to "reform" and "modernize" the existing governing system.

However, the experience of Bulgaria and many other countries shows that this academic and social problem is far from being solved. One of the main reasons for this is that an adequate holistic approach to understanding, analyzing and evaluating the governance system in general and in the agrarian sphere in particular is not yet applied. The aim of the article is to adapt the interdisciplinary methodology of the New Institutional Economics (Coase, 1991, 1998; Furubotn and Richter, 2005; Ostrom, 1990, 1998; Williamson, 1998, 2005; North, 1990) and to propose an adequate definition and approach to analyze of the system of agrarian governance in Bulgaria.

In the Bulgarian language, there are no suitable words to distinguish the categories Governance from Management, and one word (управление) is used for both of them. This often causes confusion, even among experts in the field. To avoid misunderstandings (increasingly often) the "Bulgarianized" English term Governance is used in academic, managerial and everyday practice.

## **Content and Evolution of the Understanding of Agrarian Governance**

The content of the Governance category is constantly expanding and enriching, which is determined both by the development of theory and the evolution of the forms used in practice, and the needs for evaluation and improvement. In view of its significance, Governance represents a growing interest for independent study by scholars in multiple disciplines - political scientists, legal scholars, sociologists, historians, economists, etc. In parallel, many new (specialized) areas of scientific research and governance practices are being identified and developed depending on the subject, functional area, level or type of management: program governance, contract governance, supply chain governance, environmental governance, agricultural sustainability governance, water, land and landscape governance, e-commerce governance, global governance, etc. Individual researchers and disciplines typically apply their own definitions of this key concept. Recent decades have seen borrowing and mutual enrichment, and interdisciplinarity of approaches to understanding and analyzing Governance from scientific disciplines and social practices.

It is generally accepted that Governance is a general, complex, multifaceted concept that is difficult to define in a precise way (Ali 2015; Fukuyama, 2016; Higgins and Lawrence, 2005; Scmitter, 2018; Vymětal, 2007). Attempts to define Governance can be grouped into several directions:

First, the traditional understanding of governance as agents (individuals, agencies, organizations, etc.) who govern and/or participate in governance – President, Parliament, etc. (Fukuyama, 2016). In a narrower understanding, Governance is seen as a synonym for public administration, and in a broader sense it includes non-sovereign and informal agents outside the state system - international and non-governmental organizations, supra-national institutions such as the European Union, etc. For example, in the popular New Governance paradigm, the question of "Governance without Government" is posed, which means the transfer of many traditional functions from the state to private and non-governmental organizations - provision of public goods, services, regulations, control, (self) organization, etc. In this connection, the various agents are also identified, defined as governing units that can govern - government, formal organization, socio-political, or other informal group of people. In traditional economics, for example, the main governing units that optimize the allocation of resources in accordance with their interests are households and firms.

Second, defining Governance as a process of governING. A large number of authors accept that governance is the decision-making process and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented) in society or in an organization (Ali, 2015; IoG, 2003; Planas et al., 2022; UNDP, 1997; Wolman et al., 2008). This "processual" understanding of Governance makes a connection with traditional Management, which is essentially a purposeful process of making managerial decisions at different levels of governance. A large number of international organizations also define governance in this way, mostly in relation to a given country, a certain

industry, etc. – “governance consists of traditions and institutions through which power in a given country is exercised” (World Bank, 1992, 2022).

Similarly, economic governance is defined as the processes that support economic activity and economic transactions by protecting property rights, sanctioning contracts, and taking collective action to provide appropriate physical and organizational infrastructure (Dixit, 2016). In the traditional economy, the market equilibrium is reached namely through a process of decentralized actions of the economic agents (individuals, firms, households) governed by the "invisible hand of the market". In the New Institutional Economics, in addition to the "public" level Public Ordering) and market management (Market ordering), an important component of the governing process is also private ordering (Williamson, 2005).

Third, defining Governance as a means (precondition) and a set of rules, means, methods, structures and mechanisms that govern people's behavior, activity and relationships (Furubotn and Richter, 2005; Scmitter, 2018; Vymětal, 2007; Williamson, 1996; 2005). "Governance has become a buzzword today describing the whole set of approaches and techniques for improving coordination between different levels of society" (Vymětal, 2007). Similarly, economic governance refers to the policies and regulations that are put in place by governments to manage the economy, including macroeconomic management and microeconomic management (AAID, 2008). Economics is a science that explains the "miracle" of how an order of maximization of private and aggregate product (welfare) is achieved by the actions of millions of individuals who specialize and exchange the products of one or other operations. The answers in Neoclassical Economics are that this is done (directed, coordinated, incentivized, sanctioned) by the "invisible hand of the market" and/or the "visible hand of the manager". Rare cases of "market failure" are found, but all of them are easily overcome with "state intervention".

The Old Institutionalism puts on the agenda the important role of institutions (introduced "from above" or evolved "from below") to "correct" market failures and govern the behavior of individuals. The classics of the New Institutional Economics also consider Governance in this sense: "Governance is the means by which to introduce order, thus mitigating conflicts and realizing mutual benefits" (Williamson, 2005, 2009). What is new here is that the "strange world" without transaction costs is left, and the market, hybrids, firms, and bureaus are considered as alternative structures and forms of governance of transactions (Coase, 1939, 1991, 1998; Williamson, 1996, 1999, 2005, 2009). Although they do not always mention this term, Coase, North, and Ostrom also analyze certain rules, mechanisms, and forms (institutions, structures, social arrangements, etc.) that govern the activities of individual agents and ultimately predetermine economic development (Coase, 1937, 1960, 1991; North, 1990, 1991; Ostrom, 1990, 1999).

Fourth, Governance is seen as a specific social order and the result of process of management - "the state of being governed" and "getting work done by mobilizing collective resources" (Dixit 2016; Fukuyama, 2016; Scmitter, 2018; Vymětal, 2007 ). Here it is presented rather as a general

order and framework that determines the conditions, harmony and overall effect of decentralized efforts - the management of the activities and relations of agents pursuing their interests. Accordingly, in a given country, regions, industry, etc. different types or models of governance may dominate - "Rule of Law", "Rule of Money", "Rule of Force", etc.

This understanding makes it possible to better distinguish specific governance systems in different countries, industries, eco-systems, organizations, stages of development, etc. The same governance structures and models are known to have unequal results in different countries. Some researchers limit governance only to the social and political order other than that of the state in view of the "new" role of the market, network structures, non-state agents and the informal sector (BRITANICA, 2023). The New Institutional Economics analyzes a different kind of principled order – market, private, public, international, etc.

This understanding is largely related to the study of the "quality of management" and the effort to improve the governance system, as "desired" states such as "good", "efficient", "honest", "sustainable", "transparent", "democratic" etc. becomes a criterion for its evaluation and a goal of development (EC, 2018; UN, 2015). Much of the Good Governance literature focuses on 'Governance as Implementation', namely the government's capacity to provide basic public goods and services (Fukuyama, 2016; Osabohien et al., 2020; Ronaghi et al., 2020). Increasingly, these characteristics are also applied to assess governance in the private (corporate, agribusiness, etc.) and non-governmental sectors (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Aguilera and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009; Benz and Frey, 2005; OECD, 2015 ; Rodorff et al., 2019; Sacconi, 2012; Skerman, 2016).

In that "normative" direction, the definitions of international, state, non-governmental and business organizations are also supplemented - for example, the current definition of governance of the World Bank also includes "the process by which governments are elected, controlled and replaced; the government's capacity to effectively formulate and implement rational policies; and respect for citizens and the state of the institutions that govern their economic and social relationships (World Bank, 2022). Governance Economics is precisely an attempt to apply "the study of good order and working arrangements", which includes both - the spontaneous order of the market and the deliberate order of a conscious, deliberate and purposeful kind (Williamson, 2005).

Agrarian Governance is the governance related to agricultural production. Therefore, it is "easy" to define the object of this "sectoral", along with industry, transport, health care, etc., governance. In order to understand the essence of the Governance category, it is necessary to answer the following questions: Who, Whom, What, Why, How, Where, When and for How Much?

It is obvious that Governance is related to people and human society, for without them there is only "natural governance" according to the laws of physics, biology, etc. In a hypothetical example of an individual farmer living alone on a remote island in the ocean, there is no

governance, but simply "agronomic and technological" management or Management of "(mutual) relations" with nature. In modern agriculture, however, there are no such examples. Even for a self-subsistent farmer, far from populated areas (a mountain, an island, a desert oasis), there is some "external" control of activity and behavior<sup>3</sup>. For example, there are "vested" and sanctioned property rights (for private possession, usage, management, etc.) over agricultural land by the state, local government or community.

In modern conditions, there are also a variety of mandatory state, European Union, local community, etc. regulations on the manner of cultivation and use of the land, standards for the protection of biodiversity and the environment, etc. For example, the use of certain chemicals in agricultural production and the production of cannabis in Bulgaria are prohibited and punishable; changing the use of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes is inadmissible and strictly regulated, etc. In addition, there are also informal obligations and restrictions for the farmer to respect comfort of the population and guests of the area, protection of air and water, joint use of private resources (for example, free access to the territory for tourists, hunters, scientists, etc.), order for use of municipal lands, etc. With all these formal and informal rules and restrictions (social governance system) the farmer (must) comply in order not to be sanctioned by law enforcement or society.

The farmer, however, is not a passive "participant" in (object of) governance. He lobbies or engages in collective action with other agents in the political process to get new rights, regulations, norms, government support and subsidies, etc. that suit his beliefs or interests. In this way, he becomes an active participant in the governance system of a given ecosystem, region, subsector, or the country as a whole. This simple example already answers the questions Who and Whom?

In another example, with a typical market-oriented farmer in a lowland area, the presence and need for (a system of) governing relationships with other agents is much more obvious. For example, the farmer-entrepreneur must manage his relationships with landowners, labor, suppliers of inputs and services, credit, buyers of produce, etc. in order to effectively organize the production and sale of produce. For the coordination of a large part of these relations, various types of private contracts are used for supplying the necessary resources and marketing the product - contracts for purchase, hiring, borrowing, selling, provision of a loan, etc. In the conditions of developed markets, much of the farmer's activity and his relations with other agents is coordinated and "managed by the invisible hand of the market" - the "movement" of (free) market prices and market competition.

Along with this, there are also a variety of formal, informal and business rules, regulations, norms, and standards that the farmer observes or complies with - for product and service

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<sup>3</sup> The activity and behavior of even the solitary Robinson Crusoe is "governed" by the native (English) ideology, beliefs, traditions and other "institutions" that he brought to the island and subsequently spread - Christianity, slavery, rights, etc.

quality, specifics of technological operations, labor and product safety rules, norms for the protection of natural environment and biodiversity, animal welfare standards, etc. In addition, the farmer creates and/or joins different types of collective actions and organizations to coordinate and govern more effectively his relationships with other agents or authorities - registered agricultural holdings, companies, cooperatives, associations, lobbying and interests groups. He also has his own or accepts other beliefs, ideologies, views, norms, etc. – for example, for an ecologically sustainable farm, which also (self-)manage its behaviour, actions and relationships.

All these (management) structures, forms and mechanisms are an integral part of the governance system of agrarian production at the modern stage of development and should be analyzed. Moreover, the governance system in a given country, sub-sector, region, supply chain, ecosystem or organization is highly specific and dependent on multiple socio-economic, personal, natural, etc. factors. It is well known that the Common (agricultural, economic, environmental, etc.) policies of the European Union are applied in specific "Bulgarian way" in the conditions of Bulgaria. Identifying and evaluating these specific structures, forms, and mechanisms answers the What, Why, and How?

The process of agrarian governance takes place in different time periods and spatial-territorial, organizational and hierarchical boundaries. Governance analysis should always specify these dimensions and answer the Where and When questions to be precise. In addition, the Economists ask another question related to the analysis of agrarian governance, namely How much? Different forms and structures of governance have different advantages, disadvantages and costs for individual agents, the latter known as "transaction costs" (Coase, 1937, 1960; Williamson, 1996). Agrarian agents optimize not only production costs (related to production technology), but also transaction costs related to governing relationships with other agents. Governing structures have an important economic role - to rationalize, structure, and minimize the costs of human relations (North, 1990 ; Williamson, 2000). The "discovery" of transaction costs does not change, but only adds to the Economic science subject of optimal allocation of limited resources.

Therefore, agrarian governance is to be studied as a complex system that includes four principle components: (1) agrarian and related agents involved in the governance decision-making; (2) rules, forms, and mechanisms that govern the behavior, activities, and relationships of agrarian agents; (3) processes and activities related to making managerial decisions; and (4) a specific social order resulting from the governing process and functioning of the system.

The agrarian governance system is a part (subsystem) of the social governance system and other important governance subsystems such as economy, primary industry, food, rural or urban areas, agro-ecosystem, tourism, energy, etc. The impact of and relationships with other systems of society largely (pre)determine the type of dominant system of agrarian governance and the "logic" of its development. For its part, agrarian governance is a set of different governance subsystems, differentiated depending on the type of production (plant breeding, animal breeding, fruit growing, agro-ecosystem services, etc.), the type of resources (land, water, technology, lab

The agrarian management system is a part (subsystem) of the social management system and other important management subsystems such as economy, primary industry, food, rural or urban areas, agro-ecosystem, tourism, energy, etc. The impact of and relationships with other systems of society largely (pre)determine the type of dominant system of agrarian governance and the "logic" of its development. For its part, agrarian management is a set of different management subsystems, differentiated depending on the type of production (plant breeding, animal breeding, fruit growing, agro-ecosystem services, etc.), the type of resources (land, water, technology, labor, finance, etc.), the functional area (inputs supply, innovation, marketing, risk management) etc. All of them should be studied in order to identify their specificity and role for the development of agrarian governance in general.

Agrarian governance consists of (carried out at) different levels (farm, collective organization, ecosystem, subsector, national, transnational, European, global), which are to be analyzed in order to understand the functioning and development of agrarian governance in Bulgaria.

## **Framework for Assessing the Quality of Agrarian Governance in Bulgaria**

A “new” and constantly evolving concept of “Good Governance” has been increasingly used in the last three decades by the international, public, non-governmental and business organizations (AAID, 2008; ACML, 2020; DFID, 2010; Council of Europe, 2022; IFAD, 1999; OECD, 2015; World Bank, 2022), and is been a topic of “hot” academic debates of scholars in politics, economics, organization, development studies, international politics, behavioral sciences, socio-legal studies, etc. (Aguilera and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2019; Ali, 2015; Andrews, 2008; Bayyurt, Serin, Arıkan, 2015; Cheshire, Higgins, and Lawrence, 2007; Dasgupta and Roy, 2016; Fukuyama, 2016; Higgins and Lawrence, 2005; Narzary, 2015; Riegner, 2012; Steffek and Wegmann, 2021; Tripathi, 2017; Weiss, 2000). The critical role of the (good) governance in facing important (economic, social, environmental, etc.) challenges and achieving organizational, business, community, and social (including global) goals has been well recognized by the scientists, decision-makers, and public at large (Coase, 1991; Bayyurt, Serin, Arıkan, 2015; Ostrom, 2014; North, 1990; Williamson, 2005). Subsequently, attempts have been multiplying to specify and measure “how good or bad” that important factor of social development is. Furthermore, there is increasing acceptance that the good governance is a broader category than administration, business, economic, etc. efficiency, and (besides the Government) it is to include multiple agents and (“universal”) social, environmental, etc. dimensions and goals. Thus, good governance is to be studied and assessed simultaneously as a means, a goal, and a result of “sustainable” socio-economic development (Bachev, Ivanov, and Sarov, 2020).

The major principles of “good” governance were initially introduced by the World Bank and become a benchmark related to “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. Since 1996 the Worldwide Governance Indicators have been reported annually including six governance dimensions: Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption (World Bank, 2022). In addition, principles of “good” Corporate governance were introduced by OECD in 1999 including Discipline, Transparency, Independence, Accountability, Responsibility, Fairness, and Social Responsibility (OECD, 2015). Since its introduction, the content and principles of good governance have been specified, enriched, and widely adopted by international, governmental, business, non-governmental, and other organizations. In the EU a larger set of principles for good “regional” governance have been formulated, monitored, and enforced including Fair Conduct of Elections, Representation and Participation, Responsiveness, Efficiency and Effectiveness, Openness and Transparency, Rule of Law, Ethical conduct, Competence and Capacity, Innovation and Openness to Change, Sustainability and Long-term Orientation, Sound Financial Management, Human rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion, Accountability (Council of Europe, 2022). Subsequently, many of these principles have been enshrined in national laws and regulations and/or accepted as voluntary (organizational, business etc.) standards for behavior in the Union and beyond.

Despite its widespread use still, there is no consensus about the content of the good governance and a unified approach to its “measurement”. There have been suggested and applied multiple methods for assessing the compliance with the principles (standards, codes, characteristics, dimensions, best practices, etc.) of good governance at global, regional, national, corporate, NGO, sectoral scales, at different functional areas of activity (e.g. internet, R&D, environmental management, etc.), and management of major resources (land, water, etc.) and social challenges (e.g. climate change, biodiversity preservation, etc.). Applied approaches for understanding and evaluating the system of governance mostly depend on the objectives of involved organizations and/or incorporated “methodological” frameworks. For instance, the assessments of the World Bank and some international and national donor agencies focus predominately on the public economic governance (extent of services provision, efficiency, corruption, etc.) in beneficiary countries; the framework applied by the EU, OECD, UN, and other organizations prioritize democracy, human rights, etc. aspects as well; the corporate sector puts primary attention on the safeguarding the of shareholders and (increasingly) stakeholders and social interests, etc. Similarly, political scientists and political economists are mostly interested in the “model” of governance and power relations, low scholars’ study mainly formal legal “order”, economists primarily investigate the (program, investment, transaction, third-party, etc.) costs and benefits, etc. The variation in the chosen “principles” and employed indicators for evaluating the “goodness” of governance creates confusion among different users and brings up criticism (Fukuyama, 2016). There is also a big criticism on applying a “Nirvana” approach which compares the real situation to some (Western, ideal, etc.) norms rather than to (an)other feasible “social arrangement(s)” (governance alternatives) in the specific conditions of a particular country, sector, region, agents, etc.

The holistic framework for assessing agrarian governance includes several steps: defining the components of the agrarian governance system; formulating the principles of good agrarian governance; specifying the assessment aspects for each principle; identifying the best indicators for each aspect; selecting the criteria and reference values for assessing the quality of agrarian governance for each indicators; and deriving the good governance assessment score (Ivanov and Bachev, 2022; Bachev and Ivanov, 2023).

Good Governance Principles are “universal” and relate to the best (desirable) state of the individual components of the governance system and the system as a whole. They are based on the widely accepted universal principle of good governance formulated by the international organization (EU, UN, FAO, etc.) and adapted to the specific conditions of agriculture. For instance, for the “specific” contemporary conditions of European Union (and Bulgarian) agriculture 11 (good governance) principles related to the individual component of agrarian governance have been selected by a Panel of Experts – Good Legislation, Respectful Informal Rules, Good Working Public Sector, Good Working Private Sector, Good Working Markets, High Transparency, Good Involvement, High Efficiency, Good Leadership, Equity and Solidarity, and High Synergy.

Aspects are precise standards (“measurement approaches”) for each of the Principles representing a resulting state of the evaluated system when the relevant good governance Principle is realized. For contemporary Bulgarian conditions for every Principle 17 specific Aspects with their desired position have been identified by Panel of Experts – Supportive administration, No administrative deadweight, Efficient private sector, Accessible market, Fair competition, Confident level of awareness, Participatory decision-making, High return, Low transaction costs, High competency, Recognized promotion model, Gender equity, Fair distribution, High GAV agriculture, Stable employment, Competitive trade, and Resilient environment (Table 1).

**Table 1. System of Principles, Aspects, Indicators, and Criteria for Assessing the Quality of Governance of Bulgarian Agriculture**

Principles	Aspects	Indicators	Estimation mode	Units
Good Legislation	Comprehensive legislation	Completeness of the legislation (1)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Justified enforcement	Degree of implementation and abide with legislation (2)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Level of regulation costs for get acquainted and to be enforced (3)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
Respectful Informal Rules	Mutual Trust	Level of trust between subjects in the agriculture (4)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Good Manner	Conflict level and contradiction state within agriculture community (5)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
Good Working Public Sector	No administrative deadweight	Level of unlawful payments and embezzlement (6)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Supportive administration	Satisfaction degree from administrative services (7)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Level of governmental spending for agricultural public administrating (agri-governmental expenditure unto total governmental spending) (8)	RCA method	Percent
Good Working Private Sector	Efficient Private Sector	Effectiveness of contracting among agents in agriculture (9)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Equality in the opportunities for development of different organizations forms (10)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Propensity to external contracting (contractual work to total output) (11)	RCA method	Ranking score
Good Working Market	Accessible market	Level of entry and exit market costs (12)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Fair competition	Competition fairness and avoiding price rigging (13)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Degree of market orientation (farm use and farmhouse consumption unto total output (14)	RCA method	Share
High Transparency	Confident level of awareness	Information awareness of stakeholders and agents in agriculture (15)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Costs level for information access of stakeholders and agents (16)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Decision-making transparency extent (17)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Symmetric between decisions taken and public expectations in agriculture (18)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
Good Involvement		Plurality level in decision –making process in agriculture (19)	Experts assessment	Ranking score

	Participatory decision-making	Level of unacceptable lobbying impairing third parties (20)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Scope of farm access to public agricultural support (% farms with direct payment/all farms) (21)	RCA method	Percent
High Efficiency	High return	Total spending of means and efforts for dealing with other economic agents and administration in agriculture (22)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
		Price rewarding potential (price index outputs/price input index) (23)	RCA method	Index
	Low transaction costs	Level of transaction costs in the agriculture (total farm overhead costs/total input) (24)	RCA method	Share
Good Leadership	Recognized promotion model	Level of achieving own advantage on the expense of others through legal and illegal means (25)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Recognized promotion model	Correctness and decency in the business relationships in agriculture (26)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	High competency	Degree of competency and expertise of agents in agriculture (27)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	High competency	Entrepreneurship abilities and level of self-improvement of agents (28)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
Equity and Solidarity	Ethical, religious and bigotry equity	Level of discrimination on the ethnical, religious and bigotry causes (29)	Experts assessment	Ranking score
	Fair distribution	Fairness in the remuneration of employees in agriculture (compensation of employees/factor income) (30)	RCA method	Share
	Fair distribution	Balance in the public support distribution in agriculture (Gini coefficient) (31)	RCA method	Coefficient
High Synergy	Stable employment	People engagement in agriculture (share of population employed in agriculture) (32)	RCA method	Percent
	High GAV agriculture	Significance of agriculture in the economy (GAV of agriculture per capita) (33)	RCA method	Euro
	Competitive trade	Importance of agriculture in the trade (agriculture export/agricultural import) (34)	RCA method	Index
	Resilient environment	Contribution of agriculture to climate change mitigation (% of greenhouse gases from agriculture in total GHG) (35)	RCA method	Percent
	Resilient environment	Soil protection and control of nitrogen pollution (quantity of nitrogen fertilizers use) (36)	RCA method	Kg per ha

Source: Bachev and Ivanov, 2023

Good Governance Indicators are quantitative and qualitative variables of different types which can be assessed in the specific conditions of the evaluated system allowing measurement of compliance with a particular Aspect. The set of Indicators provides a comprehensive picture of the state of individual components of agrarian governance and the system as a whole. For the selection of the Governance Indicators a number of criteria, broadly applied in the sustainability assessment literature and practices, were used: “Relevance”, “Discriminatory power”, “Analytical soundness”, “Intelligibility and synonymity”, “Measurability”, “Governance and policy relevance”, and “Practical applicability” (Bachev, Ivanov, Sarov, 2020). For the specific conditions of Bulgarian agriculture 36 indicators have been selected by the Panel of Experts (Table 1).

For assessing the particular goodness level, a system of specific Good Governance Criteria (best norms, range, standards, practices, etc.) for each Indicator are used. They are based on modern scientific research, European Union practices and standards, existing social contracts, etc. in the Bulgarian agriculture or in the evaluated subsystem of country's agriculture. Good Governance Criteria are the practically possible desired levels for each Indicator for the specific conditions of the evaluated agro-system. They assist the assessment of agrarian governance giving guidance for achieving (maintaining, improving) the best feasible standards for the particular components and the overall agrarian governance. Depending on the extent of the Criteria achievement the evaluated agro-system could be with a "good", "satisfactory" or "bad" governance. For instance, a higher or similar to the EU level correspond to good governance for a particular indicator, and vice versa.

Assessment and analysis of compliance to the principles of good agrarian governance are done for each indicator. Very often individual Indicators for each Aspect and/or different Aspect and Principles of governance with unequal, and frequently with controversial levels. That requires a transformation into a "unitless" Governance Index and integration of estimates. Diverse quantitative and qualitative levels for each indicator are transformed into a Governance Index applying an appropriate scale for each Indicator.

Initial assessment of the governance of Bulgarian agriculture was done is the end of 2022 using data from statistical and other official sources as well as assessments of an 8-member Panel of Experts including leading scholars, and representatives of governmental and farmers organizations. The difference between used two types of indicators is the estimation modes, as the later ones is based on scores of Experts from a 5-level ranking scale (Very low, Low, Middle, High and Very high). The assessment score of each indicator is determined by the desired state derived from the principle aspects and indicator criteria interpretation, which means that in some cases, "Very low" is equivalent of 0, whereas in other cases might refer to 1. For the remaining indicators of governance, the Relative Comparison Assessment Method is employed (Ivanov, 2022). The statistically generated data are from different databases on macro and farm level, including Eurostat, FADN database averaging for 3-year period (2018-2020) whole experts' judgments is done having in mind the recent years.

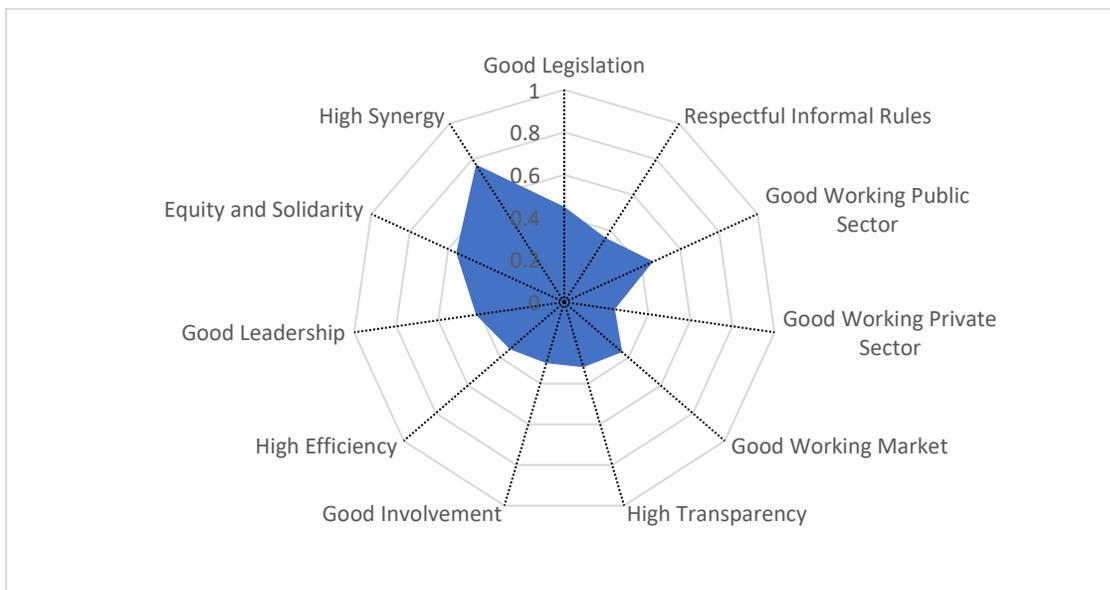
The common criteria used in this assessment is the average EU level and the medium EU situation. which is applied to provide the measurability and comparability of the assessment scores. The Good governance reference values are the practically observed indicators values on the counterpart EU average indicators. The later assist the assessment of agrarian governance giving guidance for achieving (maintaining, improving) the best feasible standards for the particular components and the overall agrarian governance.

The Integral Governance Index is computed through weighting Principal score assessment based on the principle number and component count. The Integral Governance Index of Bulgarian agriculture is represented by a qualitative score, which ranges from 0 to 1 that might be converted into qualitative assessment. For the purpose of this research are formulated five

categories that Governance Index implies: “very good”, “good”, “moderate”, “satisfactory” and “bad” governance. These qualifications are linked to: Index range 0,81-1 for a “Very Good” governance; Index range 0.56-0,80 for a “Good” governance; Index range 0,46-0,55 for a “Moderate” governance; 0,21-0,45 for a “Satisfactory” governance and Index range less than 0,20 – referring to ‘Bad or Unsatisfactory’ agrarian governance. The governance assessment is oriented to the EU level, and therefore the Moderate rate is with a shorter range (plus or minus 0,05 deviation from the “average” EU value), while the extreme (Very Good or Bad) levels are kept in the normal 0.2 range in the 5 level Governance scale. Detailed explanation and justification of applied approach is done by Ivanov and Bachev (2023).

Initial approbation of the suggested framework has found out that the Integral Governance Index of Bulgarian agriculture is at moderate level having in mind the EU perspective. The highest performance is attained under the principles of Equity and Solidarity and the Good Working Public Sector while in terms of the Working Private Sector and the Stakeholders Involvements it is the lowest (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Level of Good Governance of Bulgarian Agriculture for Major Principles**

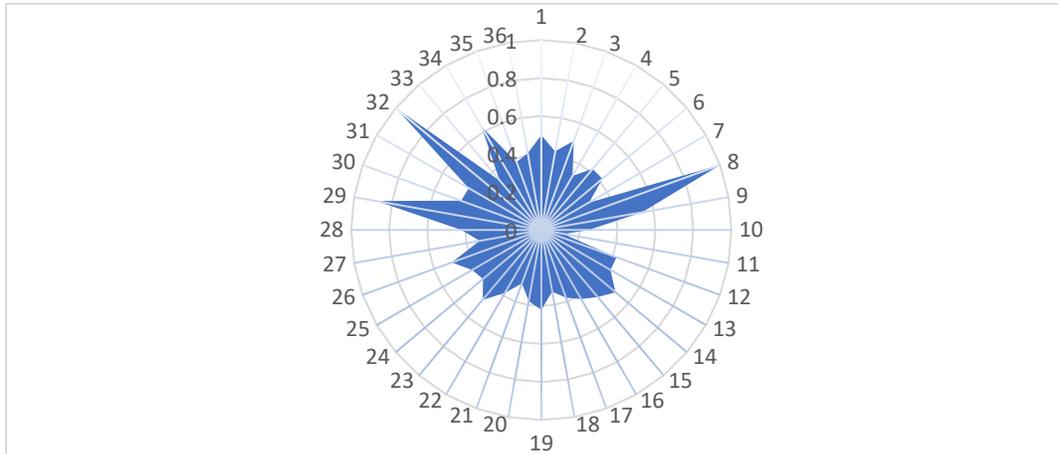


Source: author calculations

Analysis of individual indicators demonstrates that the strongest points of agrarian governance system in the country at the present stage of development are: Level of governmental spending for agricultural public administrating (agri-governmental expenditure unto total governmental spending), People engagement in agriculture (share of population employed in agriculture), Level of discrimination on the ethnical, religious and bigotry causes, Effectiveness of contracting among agents in agriculture, Importance of agriculture in the trade (agriculture export unto agricultural import), Degree of market orientation (farm use and farmhouse consumption unto total output), Completeness of the legislation, Level of regulation costs for get acquainted and

to be enforced, and Correctness and decency in the business relationships in agriculture (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Level of Good Governance of Bulgarian Agriculture for Individual Indicators**



*Source:* author calculations

At the same time, the weakest point of the governance system of Bulgarian agriculture are identified as: Propensity to external contracting (contractual work to total output), Equality in the opportunities for development of different organizations forms, Satisfaction degree from administrative services, Scope of farm access to public agricultural support (percent of farms with direct payment unto all farms), Level of trust between subjects in the agriculture, Symmetric between decisions taken and public expectations in agriculture, and Degree of competency and expertise of agents in agriculture. In all these directions the efforts of responsible officials, farm and agribusiness managers, professional organizations, and other stakeholders have to be directed though policies instruments, administration reforms, improvement of private and collective management, international assistance, etc. in order to improve the governance of agrarian sector in the country.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to prove that agrarian governance is a complex system that includes agrarian and related agents involved in management decision-making; rules, forms and mechanisms that govern the behavior, activities and relationships of agrarian agents; processes and activities related to making governance decisions; a specific social order resulting from the governing process and functioning of the system. Adapting the methodology of the New Institutional Economics allows to better understand, analyze and evaluate this complex system and its individual components. The analysis is to include the individual elements for the system, different levels of governance and the main functional areas of the farming, for each of which appropriate quantitative or qualitative methods of the institutional approach are to be used.

This study also demonstrated that the (quantitative) assessment of the governance system of Bulgarian agriculture and the level of its compliance to the principles of “Good governance” is possible. The latter is a “work in progress” and further refinements are necessary in terms of perfection of the hierarchical system of governance principles, aspects and indicators, its broader application into analysis of the governance system in major subsectors of Bulgarian agriculture (crop, livestock, etc.) and international comparisons between EU countries, as well as in appropriate data collection, including through official agri-statistics system.

Systematic theoretical and empirical research in this "new" field should be expanded to better understand this complex category and refine approaches to its economic analysis. For a better distinction and a more complete definition, a wider use of the term Governance in languages like Bulgarian (where there is no specific term to distinguish it from Management) is necessary, as is already the practice both in scientific circles and in colloquial speech.

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