



LandscapePartners

The Contribution of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Sustainable Landscape Management

Summary of project findings

Introduction

Management of landscapes and nature conservation is often undertaken by individuals who organise their activities at a group level to better coordinate and provide support for their management actions. The focus of this research was on multi-stakeholder groups at local and sub-regional levels who aim for sustainable landscape management, involving a variety of land uses and interests.

The aims of this research were to improve understanding of multi-stakeholder groups' contributions and to find ways to assess sustainable landscape management.

Agri-environmental cooperatives in Germany and the Netherlands

(*Landschaftspflegeverbände, Agrarische Natuurverenigingen*) were studied as examples of groups, to investigate what they document, what indicators they use, and how they report their contributions. The resilience of these groups was also explored. Empirical research included interviews, an online survey, and analysis of the groups' annual reports and other documents.

The contribution of agri-environmental cooperatives (also called 'Landcare groups') to sustainable landscape management is difficult to assess for several reasons

- What is 'sustainable' is not well-defined, in theory or in practice;
- 'Sustainability' depends on the perspective the evaluator takes and what his/her interests are;
- There are issues relating to scale and aggregation (i.e. what is sustainable for a group or a region may not be sustainable for a country or all of Europe, and vice versa);
- The boundaries of landscapes are fuzzy and rarely overlap with administrative boundaries, which many groups align to;
- Group activities and ultimately their contributions tend to focus on only one or two dimensions of sustainability (e.g. environmental, economic or social) due to the interests of group members and the nature of project funding; which is typically not holistic (in terms of objectives or assessment) but determines a considerable share of group activities.

Contribution to sustainable landscape management

According to the agri-environmental cooperatives surveyed, 40% of German groups and 27% of Dutch groups contribute to all three dimensions of sustainable landscape management: the environmental, economic and social dimension. Figure 1 shows the percentage of groups that said they contribute to each dimension.

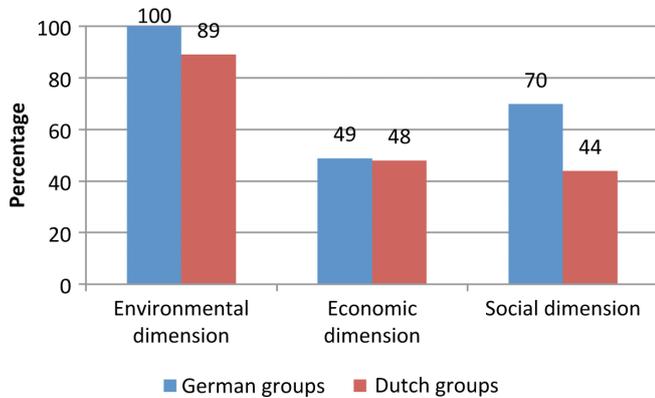


Figure 1: The percentage of agri-environmental groups who reported they contributed to different dimensions of sustainable landscape management (n=116, 43 German, 73 Dutch)

When asked for their main focus, 93% of German groups chose the environmental dimension. In contrast, only 67% of Dutch groups chose the environmental dimension and 26% said their main focus is on the economic dimension of sustainability.

Note – the total contribution of different groups cannot easily be compared because:

- Not all contributions of individual groups are fully captured; and
- There are issues around whether contributions are comparable at all (e.g. is conserving a particular species ‘worth’ more than enhancing water quality, or is doing this work in a Dutch province ‘worth’ more than doing it in Eastern Germany?)

Measuring contributions – using indicators

Indicators are units of measurement used to **determine the output (results) and the outcomes (impact) of actions** to be able to say whether the actions contribute to the sustainability of a rural landscape. 96% of the groups surveyed reported that they measure at least one indicator, out of 41 suggested in the survey (e.g. numbers of trees planted, number of participants at an organised event). The extent of monitoring and recording activities, however, varies considerably between groups. While there is no correlation between monitoring and the size of a group (in terms of membership or area covered), there is a statistically significant correlation between the number of indicators documented by the group and the number of staff they employ. This underlines the **important role that a project coordinator or facilitator can play** for the ability of a group to monitor and report on their contributions. In addition, this role can be crucial for aligning evaluation efforts to higher level reporting requirements.

Numerical indicators tend to be measured more often than qualitative, descriptive indicators. Although non-quantifiable indicators are difficult to collect and assess they have the potential to capture important contributions, especially in relation to the social dimension of sustainability. One-off data is easier to compile than data compiled over a longer period of time. The popularity of different indicators varied between German and Dutch groups, but examples of commonly recorded indicators include:

- Number of projects implemented
- Number of group members
- Number of farmers under contract
- Size of area managed
- Number of birds/nest protected
- Number of events

Very few groups use indicators to record things such as: nitrate reduction; area under erosion control measures; visiting tourists; or water quality. Possible explanations for this may be that only few groups undertake such activities, such indicators are more difficult to measure, or other bodies are responsible for this kind of data. **Many groups in both countries reported that they do not have the resources to measure certain indicators.**

Groups tend to monitor the impact of the activities that are important to them and report them in ways that address their members’ needs. Overall, there is little overlap between the indicators used by groups at the local and sub-regional



levels and the indicators used in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) at the European level. Examples of common indicators in this respect includes farmland bird populations (biodiversity indicator), and numbers of training events. However, groups would struggle to feed into the CMEF indicators such as water quality, additional number of tourist visits, or number of jobs created. This highlights a **lack of compatibility between the assessment of policy effectiveness at European level with the assessment of sustainable land management at the local scale.**

In order to enhance the evaluation of rural development and agri-environmental funding schemes, projects or landscape management activities, it would be beneficial to draw on the expertise of local groups that are involved in the management in addition to (external) expert judgement. If there is demand for more data (e.g. monitoring results) to be provided by groups for evaluation at national or European levels, it is useful to know what characterises those groups that make greater use of indicators. The following factors were found to enhance the use of indicators:

- Expertise and personal interests of members
- Group has defined for itself that effort, resources and time spent on monitoring and reporting is well invested
- Group employs a professional who coordinates monitoring and manages the data
- Affiliation of the group with other volunteer or conservation groups
- Data is held within the group rather than with individual members or other authorities
- Group involvement in large projects with a monitoring component (problem: monitoring does not continue beyond project duration)

- Figures that the group needs to provide for funding applications, agreements with the municipality, or contracts
- Groups with an active umbrella organisation/ organisational structure that coordinates data collection, analysis and promotion of group contributions
- Straightforward cause-effect relationships between management and its impact as well as clearly delineated boundaries.

Three-quarters of groups document indicators in their annual reports or project reports, but very few reports are available online. Hence, much of the data in reports is not readily available for further analysis. In addition, some of the data recorded by groups is not compiled in reports at all. This lack of data (or its dispersed nature) and the lack of comparability create difficulties in evaluating and aggregating the contribution of individual groups. However there are some examples where advanced data collection and aggregation across scales is evident, such as farmland birds (particularly in the Netherlands).

The findings emphasise an important (and as yet unresolved) **issue about how much paperwork the volunteers who make up these agri-environmental collaboratives can be expected to do**; should they do the work on the ground or spend their time writing about it?

The assessment of policies and impact on sustainable landscapes would be greatly enhanced if **data collection and recording was made easier** for groups and individuals (e.g. through technology such as mobile phone applications), and **data bases were shared and managed intelligently** across organisations and levels.

Resilience of groups

Despite the lack of quantitative data, the interviews revealed many benefits that agri-environmental collaboratives bring to the holistic management of a landscape, not least because many groups work in 'everyday landscapes' as well as in protected areas. The groups can only contribute to sustainability (in terms of its different dimensions) if they can meet the numerous challenges they face. About **two thirds of all groups state that they are limited in the activities they want to undertake**, whereby the most important limitations they face are the 'lack of funding for projects', 'staff time' available to groups, and 'legal restrictions' (particularly in the Netherlands).



Looking at overall ‘health’ of groups in terms of their viability (Figure 2), the majority of both German and Dutch groups in the survey report that group health is ‘good’ or ‘very good’.

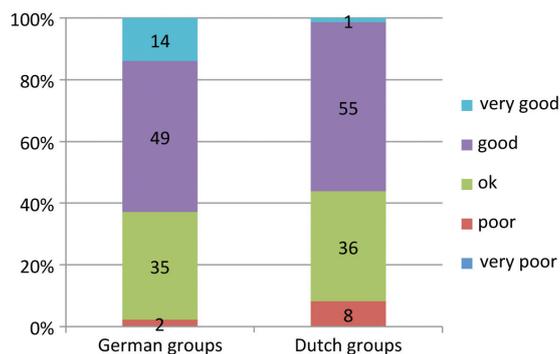


Figure 2: The rating of their agri-environmental group’s ‘health’ as selected from a choice of 5 categories from very good to very poor (n=116, 43 German, 73 Dutch)

Groups in both countries show a ‘good’ level of activity, but in the longer term the recruitment of new members needs serious attention. Although a large share of groups assessed their financial viability as ‘ok’, the interviews showed that this is an area of concern and there is scope for improvement. A theme that came out strongly from the interviews was that resilient groups are better able to make contributions to sustainable landscape management. For example, they build durable networks and trust with a diverse set of stakeholders that are important for landscape management; they compile tacit environmental and social knowledge; they are implementation mechanisms for policies and spatial plans; and they act as ‘multipliers’ (contacts) for authorities to a broad range of land managers. Hence, fostering

Conclusion

If we want to know what the impact of policies, funding schemes and local group activities is on the landscape as a whole, and whether management contributes to sustainable landscapes, we need to set clear, measurable objectives and agree on indicators that show progress or otherwise. These indicators need to be agreed at local, regional, national and European level with people involved in management, policy makers, and potentially even the wider public (since tax money is being spent). In addition, the aggregation rules for data on chosen indicators need to be agreed. Only then can contributions to sustainable landscape management be efficiently funded, acknowledged and rewarded.

Publications, material and further information are available on the project website: www.macaulay.ac.uk/LandscapePartners

If you are interested in a specific issue, please get in touch and I will provide tailored information.

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resilience and longevity of local groups is a beneficial investment. The following factors were found to influence group resilience positively:

- Commitment from local and regional authorities to support groups (both financially and in-kind, by acknowledging them as valued partners)
- Successful implementation of locally relevant projects
- Utilisation of a variety of funding sources rather than dependency of a single funding source (Figure 3)
- Flexible group structures to deal with changing policy and funding environments
- Sufficient influx of new members to maintain a viable group size
- Support of a coordinator and/or a diverse skill-set among members (or affiliates) of the groups
- Strong umbrella groups

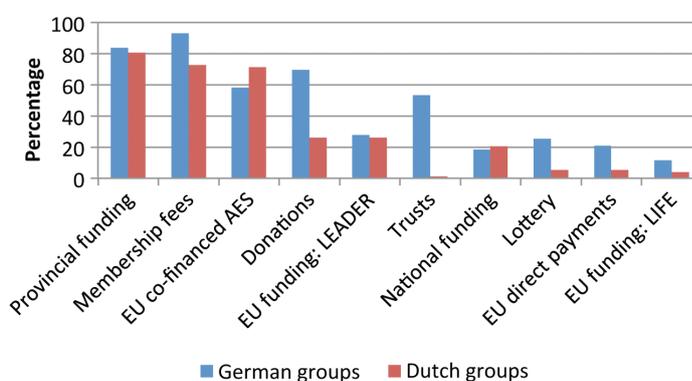


Figure 3: The percentage of agri-environmental groups within each country, that access each type of funding source (multiple funding sources reported by each group) (n=116, 43 German, 73 Dutch)

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