



Benefits, efforts and risks of participants in landscape co-management: An analytical framework and results from two case studies in Austria

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ABSTRACT

Participatory processes in general and also in relation to managing landscape issues are gathering importance mostly due to arguments surrounding legitimacy and effectiveness in decision-making. The main aim of this research, based on a transaction costs perspective, is to present an integrated analytical framework in order to determine individual efforts (time, money), benefits and risks of participants in landscape co-management processes. Furthermore a reflection on the analytical approach developed and arising lessons to be learned for landscape co-management are presented. In the analytical framework benefit-components comprise of factors such as 'contributing to landscape maintenance/development and nature protection', 'representing one's interest group', 'co-deciding on relevant topics', 'providing and broadening one's knowledge' and 'building networks'. The risks of participation are related to a lack of information and agreements, missing support and actual decision-making power. The analytical framework is applied to two case studies in Austria: an EU LIFE-Nature project and a Cultural Landscape Project of the Provincial Government of Lower Austria. Analysis of the effort-benefit-relations provides an indication for a more effective design of co-management. Although the processes are rated as quite adequate, there is a low willingness of participants to commit additional time to co-management processes. In contrast to the Cultural Landscape Project, in the LIFE-Nature project, professionally involved persons participate next to partly and full volunteers. These uneven conditions of participation and an unfair distribution of transaction costs, jeopardize the promising chances co-management bears for landscape governance.

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1. Introduction

Landscape amenities, formerly unintended by-products of agricultural land use, are now regarded as a key environmental asset and are highly valued by society (Van Huylenbroeck et al., 1999). This re-valorisation has resulted in increased societal efforts to control landscape development. National and international institutions involved with landscape development such as international conventions, EU-supporting schemes and legal restrictions are growing in number and relevance, meanwhile European policies and instruments such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have for some decades been characterized by centralisation and standardisation (Pinto-Correia et al., 2006).

Decision-makers controlling landscape development often neither live nor work in the relevant landscapes (Penker, 2009). Distances are growing between those who formulate management strategies in landscape development, based on expert knowledge, and those who are requested to act in the physical landscape (Hägerstrand, 1995). This approach has displaced the local knowledge of nature, rather than adding to it (Stenseke, 2009). Pinto-Correia et al. (2006) revealed in a study of three European countries, that the policy of landscape development is very top-down driven, the relation of local population as users of landscape is insufficiently considered and that there are fewer and fewer active farmers in the countryside, creating a new and challenging situation for landscape management. According to Hodge (2007) a uniform, centrally planned approach will not meet the requirements of a well-managed, unique and typical landscape. Consequently, scientists, environmental activists and international organisations are calling for an increased involvement of the local population (Berkes, 2002; Council of Europe, 2000; Hodge, 2007; Mitchell, 2005; O'Rourke, 2005; Paavola, 2003/2004, Paavola, 2007; Plummer and Arai,

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2005; Stenseke, 2009). The potential and need to involve local people in landscape management and planning is explicitly expressed in the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (1992), the *European Landscape Convention* (Council of Europe, 2000) and the *Aarhus Convention* (UNECE, 1998). However, actual means and ways of implementing this participatory approach are only vaguely described in these conventions (Stenseke, 2009).

Apart from the potentials and possible advantages of participatory decision-making, there are some challenges that have to be considered. Such participatory approaches – often referred to as co-management – typically shift tasks and costs from state agencies to locals. While state agencies can economise for example on monitoring costs, locals expend time on activities such as information gathering, decision-making and monitoring (Birner and Wittmer, 2000). This shift of transaction costs is a reason why co-management has only prospects of success if there are tangible benefits for the local groups involved (Birner and Wittmer, 2000).

According to Adhikari and Lovett (2006) existing literature on transaction cost economics offers powerful conceptual insights, but this concept has not yet been transferred to participatory approaches in landscape development. In this study we provide an analytical framework for analysing transaction costs of stakeholders involved in participatory decision-making in landscape development, connecting it not only to the benefits but also to the risks of local participation. This novel integrative perspective could shed some light on how co-management actually works out for individuals whose willingness to co-operate is crucial for any co-management arrangement.

The paper is based on the following research questions:

- How can Transaction Cost Economics be operationalised in order to analyse co-management arrangements in landscape development?
- What are the efforts, benefits and risks for individuals to participate in exemplified co-management arrangements?
- What are the opportunities and limitations of this analytical approach?
- What are the lessons to be learned for landscape co-management?

We briefly introduce the concepts of governance and landscape co-management and present our analytical framework, which we apply to two Austrian case studies: a LIFE-Nature project and a 'Kulturlandschaftsprojekt' (Cultural Landscape Project) of the Provincial Government of Lower Austria. Finally, we compare the results of the case studies and conclude with potentials and shortcomings of our approach and some implications for the design of co-management arrangements.

2. Landscape governance and co-management

Based on Paavola and Adger (2005) – we define landscape governance as the establishment, reaffirmation or change of institutions to resolve conflicts over cultural landscape issues. Landscape in this paper is understood as “[...] an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors” (Council of Europe, 2000, 3) thus reflecting a socially and/or culturally shaped and constituted entity (Görg, 2007). Referring to these landscape definitions the object of landscape governance in this paper is not the ‘untouched’ or ‘natural’ landscapes, but those shaped by centuries of land use, which is typical for European landscapes.

Landscape development cannot easily be subject to control by a central organisation such as a national government (Hodge,

2007). There is a role and a need for multi-level-management institutions with attention to across the scale interactions (Berkes, 2002). In the special case of landscape co-management, besides policy representatives, the interests of landowners and others should be integrated in order to involve diverse interests in landscape development. We use the term co-management as “governance systems that combine state control with local, decentralised decision-making and accountability and which, ideally, combine the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each” (Singleton, 1998, 7). From this perspective we involve actors like landowners and other user groups as belonging to the local level. Thus co-management arrangements shift some control, administration and enforcement of agreements from the government to the local communities (Birner et al., 2002; Mburu et al., 2003). Berkes (2009, 1695) mentions the potentials of this approach by referring to “bridging organisations that provide an arena for knowledge co-production, trust building, sense making, learning, vertical and horizontal collaboration, and conflict resolution.”

Participation is a crucial element of co-management and can be realised on different levels (Arnstein, 1969; Carlsson and Berkes, 2005; Tress et al., 2005). Stakeholders or citizens may be informed, consulted, be involved in decision-making, have the opportunity to influence or even to control the outcomes. The higher on Arnstein's ladder of participation, the greater the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product of landscape policy. According to Berkes (2009) usually mere consultation or ad hoc public participation is not regarded as co-management. To attain intensive user participation in decision-making, some institutionalised arrangement is required (Berkes, 2009). We focus on co-management equivalent to higher degrees of participation such as partnership – delegated power – citizen control (Arnstein, 1969) and thus on direct involvement of local actors in decision-making, whereby components of information and consultation may also be included.

As a literature research indicates, there exist several forms and practical examples of participatory landscape governance and co-management. In Europe, next to Cultural landscape projects and LIFE-nature projects, which we highlight in this article, there are also examples of participatory steering groups in Natura 2000 areas. Further examples with reference to landscape development include: Landscape Development Concepts (Höppner et al., 2005) and according to Hodge (2007) the Landcare approach developed in Australia and Landcare partnership in the UK. For further experiences of participatory landscape governance projects see Buchecker et al. (2003) and Stenseke (2009).

3. An analytical framework for analysing individual efforts, benefits and risks of participants in co-management processes

Our analytical framework builds on three dimensions: transactions costs, benefits and risks. While the first is based on the still manageable but growing body of empirical transaction cost literature, the latter two are a condensation of a variety of sources from participation research, co-management and multi-level governance literature.

3.1. The dimension of transaction costs

New Institutional Economics already has quite a tradition in analysing transaction costs (Coase, 1937; North, 1990; Williamson, 1985), with information costs comprising a main element of them (Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck, 2002). However no exact standard definition of the term transaction costs exists (McCann et al., 2005; Rørstad et al., 2007; Wang, 2003). To define our

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