



Social innovation in the Welsh Woodlands: Community based forestry as collective third-sector engagement



Ludvig Alice^{a,*}, Wilding Maria^b, Thorogood Adam^b, Weiss Gerhard^a

^a Institute of Forest, Environmental and Natural Resource Policy, Department of Economics and Social Science, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) and The European Forest Institute Central Eastern European Regional Office (EFICEEC), Feistmantelstr. 4, 1180 Vienna, Austria

^b Llais y Goedwig, Unit 6 Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8AX, Wales, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Community forestry
Social enterprise
Social forestry
Volunteer work
Third sector
Not-for-profit forest enterprise

ABSTRACT

In the UK the term “Third Sector” is traditionally an umbrella term for all organisations working with civil society in a not-for-profit capacity; differentiating them from the public (first) and the private (second) sector. In other European countries, such ways of non-profit making work in non-governmental organisations are summarised under the term “civil sector”. The paper sets out to examine the specific challenges and success factors for social innovation (SI) in the forest sector at hand of two community centres located in Welsh Woodlands: The Woodlands Skills Centre and Coppice Wood College. These are both cases for social innovations as many of their activities and services have the explicit goal to meet social needs; their organisation is inclusive and participatory towards civil society actors. Both are community forestry enterprises with many similarities. Both projects have reached successful levels of rural empowerment and are bringing livelihood and income to their areas. Notwithstanding their similarities, our in-depth research detects specific differences in the organisations, namely their legal status and their different business models at the organisational level. Both initiatives are relatively long term projects with complex governance structures, but very different ownership structures, different financial maintenance and a different conceptualisation of the services and goods they provide. Our insights contribute with examples of two in-depth empirical case studies to general research on community forestry and to research on social innovation, namely to the procedural determinants of origin and support factors of innovation. For policy and practice the support of SI in forestry is relevant especially for regional development in rural areas.

1. Introduction

Commonly owned forests and common property regimes are types of forest ownership that exist in many European countries in various forms: they include traditional commons with a more or less unbroken history of 500 years or more, typically to be found in Austria, France, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland (Živojinović et al., 2015). As an outcome of land reforms in the 18th and 19th centuries, community-owned or -managed forests were established for instance in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden, and also very recently in the UK (Weiss et al., 2017a). Especially in such recent developments in the UK, third sector ownership is the principal type: it is social enterprises, environmental or other non-profit distributing¹ organisations that increasingly acquire forest for special management objectives that often

are also in the public interest. “Social enterprises”, also called “social business” (European Union, 2014, 67f.) or “social economy” (European Union, 2014, 37f.) all include not-for profit enterprises who can be promising drivers of social innovations in structurally weak rural regions. Such enterprises strive to tackle social problems and to stabilise and improve the living conditions in these regions. One important factor for their functioning is volunteering. Volunteers are important for social connectedness, social inclusion and enhancement of well-being within communities (Brodie et al., 2009). The definition of social innovation (SI) developed within the SIMRA-project² is “the re-configuring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the volunteer engagement of civil society actors” (Polman et al., 2017). From this definition it becomes clear that SI is not limited to being associated

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: alice.ludvig@boku.ac.at (A. Ludvig).

¹ “Non-profit distributing organisations” are not returning profits to their owners or directors but use any surplus of revenues to further achieve their ultimate objective. Salomon and Anheier (1992) have provided several patterns of differentiation for describing the non-profit sector.

² Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (<http://www.simra-h2020.eu/>).

with the social economy but also included in the private and public sectors, in new technologies, research institutions and other actors and institutions of civil society. However, according to SI definitions, there is some demand to include “volunteer” work of civil society (non-state actors). In other words, volunteering for SI can be the delivery of unpaid work for a non-profit organisation. On the one hand this is fascinating (Brodie et al., 2009) on the other it could also become problematic, to its most extreme turning the activities into exploitation of labour force. From 33 case studies on community based forest enterprises in Britain examined by Ambrose-Oji et al. (2014), 19 include volunteer work and two are based entirely on volunteers (Ambrose-Oji et al., 2014, p. 3).

The aim of the article is to highlight the types of community efforts and social practices in SI in forest management and identify their success factors. SI functions as a mechanism for civil society actors to find new ways to meet social needs, and to fill gaps that cannot be fulfilled by state or markets (Murray et al., 2010). Interestingly, many of the ecosystem services provided by forests also have no directly marketable benefit, such as all cultural and societal values, landscape maintenance, the combat of air pollution and many recreational services. Although some profit might be possible, it is not the principal purpose or characteristic of community forestry in the study at hand. This raises the question how the community enterprises could survive and become successful. Thus, the article will derive lessons learned for policy and practice in community forestry.

In what follows, we will first outline our theoretical approach to SI, volunteering and community engagement in forestry as a basis to the two case studies and introduce the methods applied in this research. The subsequent results section will compare our results along the lines of differences and communalities between the two cases. Finally we will discuss their success factors along the lines of the deductively derived criteria of organisation, financing, lead, co-operation, support and future prospects. Their different approaches and solutions in these matters show the diversity in successful community woodland management across what may, at first sight look like similar cases.

2. Theoretical background: Successful community woodland management as SI in Wales

Our theoretical approach is centred on a classification that distinguishes between the role played by state-run public institutions and the capacities of civil society actors to self-organise. Our focus is on the configurations of such private actors and their abilities to produce and maintain a particular portfolio of resources (e.g. societal acknowledgement, personnel, money, information, organisational advantages, supportive regulations, time etc.). Especially community based forestry has been employed to describe a wide range of social not-for-profit activities associated with use and management of forest resources (Flint et al., 2008). Baker and Kusel (2003, 8) identified its objectives as being “to conserve or restore forest ecosystems while improving the well-being of communities that depend on them.” Broadly this means that communities have involvement in leadership, decision making and management of forest resources and also gain benefits from it (Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013; Lawrence and

Molteno, 2012). Communities can be any group of people that interact on a daily basis and the grade of involvement in the activities above also varies. Finally, community based forestry doesn't necessarily imply being a not-for profit enterprise. Unlike social enterprises (Shaw and de Bruin, 2013), community forestry can even be for-profit seeking business, either fully or in parts. It will still be a “community forestry enterprise”, even if the gains are not reinvested into the community. Depending on different legal frameworks across the UK, there are several distinct models and legal structures amongst such organisations and depending on the singular arrangements, preferences and surrounding conditions also differences in main focus and grade of “community involvement” (Ambrose-Oji et al., 2014). There are many different arrangements in terms of legal structure (Ambrose-Oji et al., 2014) and we selected two not-for profit community woodlands, one is juridically registered as an “educational charity”; the other being a “charitable company” that is a not-for profit Social Enterprise company. Both have one main focus in education, training and forestry services, both have employees and both involve trustees and volunteers. Recent literature on volunteering has investigated the reasons that people volunteer. Volunteering tends to be more common amongst individuals who are “native” citizens, older than 40, have children, are married, have paid income (e.g. part-time), own their house and have children (Einolf and Chambré, 2011; Musick and Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2012). Volunteers are most satisfied when they receive training, support, recognition from the organisation and when there is mutual and equal respect between the volunteers and the paid workers, when the expectations are clear but also when they have freedom of choice in their work and not too much bureaucracy (Studer and von Schnubein, 2013). Community woodlands with trustees and volunteers representing the communities involved are a growing number in Wales. There seems often to be a societal ethos of caring for the woodlands, forests and surrounding land involved, coupled with a desire to return to a “simpler way of life”. This is mirrored by an increasing interest in ‘wild’ foods and pursuits in society at large (Weiss et al., 2017b), as well as growing media interest in the harvesting and consuming local products. Initial research into the sector of such products in Wales revealed that although the sector could not be described as large, there are a significant number of emerging small businesses that are using these products (Wong and Dickinson, 2003). These invariably form the basis of the services they offer, the products they manufacture, or a combination of both. However, the two community woodland enterprises selected for this article offer both a wide range of social services, training and education courses as well as actual woodland management activities that go well beyond the mere production of products and goods.

3. Methods and data

3.1. Case study methodology

We selected the cases from 30 community forest enterprises in Wales as two distinctive ones with foremost not-for profit and charitable goals for in-depth study. Both are located in the area of Northern and Western Wales (see map below).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6544699>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6544699>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)