



Landscape co-management in Austria: The stakeholder's perspective on efforts, benefits and risks



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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Landscape governance
Co-management
Participants
Efforts
Risks
Benefits
Austria

Multi-level co-management schemes in Austria shift some effort for decision-making in landscape development from central state authorities to local actors. We analyse the efforts, benefits and risks of participation as perceived by the individuals involved in five cases from three different programmes (one EU-LIFE-Nature project, two EU-Natura 2000 local steering groups, two Cultural Landscape Projects of the Nature conservation Department of Lower Austria). Results from exploratory interviews, a survey of participants, problem centred interviews with drop-outs, interviews with process leaders, observation and document analysis are triangulated for intra- and inter-case consistency and validity. All case studies indicate an overall positive evaluation of the collaboration and the perceived benefits (e.g. contributing to nature protection, bringing in one's own knowledge and experiences), an adequate effort for process activities and relatively low risks of participation (e.g., lack of agreements on procedures, unclear scope for decision-making, missing implementation of decisions, dominating individuals). The results show a significant positive correlation between time effort and benefits and significant negative correlations between effort and risks as well as benefits and risks. A comparison of professionally involved participants and volunteers highlight disproportionally high opportunity costs of volunteers. Volunteers also tend to benefit less from their participation. Some of the volunteers dropped out, because they did not have the feeling to benefit from the participation. These dropouts perceived higher risks and lower trust in the process than the still active participants. The paper discusses the methods applied and concludes with some lessons learnt for practical landscape co-management.

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1. Introduction

International conventions, EU co-financed agri-environmental schemes, nature conservation laws and other restrictions on land use are growing in number and relevance all over Europe (Enengel et al., 2011). According to Pinto-Correia et al. (2006) many of these landscape policies are top-down driven and do not sufficiently consider the interests of the local population, i.e. the landscape users. Decision-makers controlling landscape development often neither live nor work in the relevant landscapes and thus distances are growing between those who formulate management strategies in landscape development, based on expert knowledge, and those who are requested to live and act in the physical landscape

(Hägerstrand, 1995; Penker, 2009). By definition landscape reflects a socially and/or culturally shaped and constituted entity (Görg, 2007), and Olwig (2002) links the diversity and uniqueness of landscapes to the fact that they have been shaped by local people, their customs and institutions. Thus, a uniform, centrally planned approach will not meet the requirements of well-managed, unique and typical landscapes (Hodge, 2007). A growing number of scholars argues that context sensitive landscape development requires multi-level governance schemes involving the local population as well as stakeholders on regional and supra-regional level (e.g., Berkes, 2002; Franks and Gloin, 2007; Paavola, 2004, 2007; Mitchell, 2005; O'Rourke, 2005; Plummer and Arai, 2005; Gailing et al., 2006; Hodge, 2007; Stenseke, 2009; Tiemann and Siebert, 2009). This argumentation is in line with several policy documents: The Convention on Biological Diversity (United Nations, 1992), the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe (2000)), the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998) and the Strategic Plan 2009–2014 of the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE,

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2008) express the potential and need to involve local people in landscape management and planning.

For the achievement of more effective management solutions, Wallington and Lawrence (2008) consider the engagement of state and civil society actors in semi-autonomous regional bodies as the most appropriate institutional structure. In co-management processes (Birner et al., 2002; Mburu et al., 2003) decision-making is shared between the more central levels and the local level. Terms like multi-level landscape governance, public-private partnership, participatory management, joint management, shared co-management, multi-stakeholder management and round tables are often used as synonyms for co-management (Borrini-Feyerabend, 1996). We use the term co-management as “governance systems that combine state control with local, decentralized decision-making and accountability and which, ideally, combine the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each” (Singleton, 1998, 7). According to this definition local actors such as landowners and other user groups participate in decision-making processes on landscape development. As participation is a crucial element of co-management (Enengel et al., 2011), we consider landscape co-management equivalent to higher degrees of participation (such as partnership, delegated power, citizen control; Arnstein, 1969), which include elements of “consultation” and “empowerment” (Enengel et al., 2012). While “consultation” means that local participants are invited to comment on proposals and contribute ideas and suggestions, so that these can be taken into account in the planning process. “Empowerment” describes decision-making processes that give local actors a say in developing, implementing and conducting a landscape project. Berkes (2009, 1695) mentions the potentials of such co-management arrangements – whether consultation or empowerment – by referring to “bridging organisations that provide an arena for knowledge coproduction, trust building, sense making, learning, vertical and horizontal collaboration, and conflict resolution”. The involvement of local stakeholders promises just, sustainable and finally better solutions due to the integration of different kinds of knowledge (Soliva et al., 2008). At the same time, planning effort and responsibility as well as decision-making are partially transferred from upper tier public authorities to local landholders, stakeholders and local authorities. In these participatory processes, locals contribute time for a common cause. However, co-management can only be successful and satisfactory, if both – representatives of upper tier authorities as well as local actors – benefit from their participation. Besides the expected benefit, also perceived risks might influence the local actors’ willingness to participate. This paper sheds light on the stakeholder’s perspective and on the relations of individual efforts, benefits and risks as perceived by those participating in landscape co-management. We focus on two research questions:

1. How can landscape co-management schemes be characterised and differentiated regarding individual efforts, benefits, risks, actors involved, and level of stakeholder/citizen participation?
2. How do participants and drop-outs perceive individual effort-benefit-risk relations?

In order to answer the research questions raised we briefly present an empirical analytical framework which is based on the three dimensions individual efforts, benefits and risks (Section 2). Section 3 provides methods, data and description of five case studies. Section 4 highlights the results of the comparative case study analysis. In section 5 we discuss the results and methods applied. Finally, we present some lessons learnt for practical landscape co-management, which were cross-checked for feasibility by two project managers.

2. The analytical framework in a nutshell – analysing individual efforts, benefits and risks OF participants IN CO-MANAGEMENT processes

Our analytical framework builds on three dimensions: individual efforts, benefits and risks. For a detailed presentation of the analytical framework see Enengel et al. (2011).

2.1. The dimension of individual efforts

We include individual efforts of the stakeholders related to landscape co-management schemes such as time lost to meetings, time required to acquire information and to communicate with others, and direct monetary expenditures for information, travel and communication; these efforts are usually referred to as transaction costs (Hanna, 1995). Furthermore, we distinguish between public efforts (e.g. by representatives of public authorities participating in their working hours) and the efforts of volunteers, as participation is time-consuming and costly also for the local stakeholders.

Similar to other studies (McCann and Easter, 1999; Falconer and Saunders, 2002; Mburu et al., 2003; Adhikari and Lovett, 2006; Rørstad et al., 2007), we surveyed time efforts for specific activities. Participants were asked to estimate their time effort and monetary expenditures for participation in co-management activities (e.g. meetings, information procurement, excursions and communication). We did not relate these hours to a monetary value, such as the interviewee’s salary or hourly rates. Thus we did not differentiate e.g. between opportunity costs of volunteers in retirement without many obligations and participants busy in professional and/or family matters. Despite our interest in effort-benefit relations, we did not opt for a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis (McCann et al., 2005), as benefit types and levels vary from setting to setting, from individual to individual and most of the benefits are of immaterial nature.

2.2. The dimension of benefit factors and motivations

As the focus of this paper is on individual efforts of participants in participatory decision-making, the corresponding individual benefits – as perceived by participants – are to be considered. If people are convinced that e.g. cultural landscapes represent an asset worth to preserve or that there is need for action, they will rather participate. How this participation finally works out, depends on the local “action arena”, which is influenced by behavioural norms, group dynamics, homogeneity of preferences, and resource allocation (Ostrom, 1998, 71). The importance of a clearly perceived benefit for participation is well captured in literature (Selle, 1996; Birner et al., 2002; Mburu et al., 2003; Freese and Ruffer, 2005; Mitchell, 2005; Hodge, 2007), in particular also in the context of motivations of farmers and non-farmers to become members in environmental co-operatives (Franks and Gloin, 2007). Based on this literature, structured interviews and surveys were conducted in the case studies. For more details on the benefit factors analysed see Enengel et al. (2011). Results of the benefit factors are presented in Section 4.3. and Table 5.

2.3. The dimension of risk factors

A broad range of literature (Selle, 1996; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Smith, 2008) addresses problems, risks and the complexity of participatory processes, which we could also identify in initial exploratory expert interviews, e.g. group domination by single participants or lack of actual decision-making power due to pre-decided plans. This altogether formed the

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