



Strategies for achieving environmental policy integration at the landscape level. A framework illustrated with an analysis of landscape governance in Rwanda



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ABSTRACT

Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) refers to the incorporation of environmental concerns into sectoral policies in order to reduce policy incoherence and achieve synergies to more effectively address environmental problems such as environmental degradation. Landscape governance can be considered as a specific, spatial manifestation of EPI: it aims to balance agricultural production, nature conservation and livelihood needs at the landscape level through multi-stakeholder decision making. Despite their common focus on policy conflicts, both concepts have been elaborated in largely isolated bodies of literature, while little is known about their common concern of how actors at the landscape level deal with these policy conflicts. This paper addresses this under-explored theme, by drawing from both EPI and landscape governance theories, and adding new insights from institutional and innovation literature. We develop a framework specifying how actors at local, district and national levels deal with policy conflicts and employ strategies to overcome them. We illustrate the analytical framework with a case from Rwanda, where landscape restoration has become a new policy area which has brought sectoral policy conflicts to the fore. We characterise these policy conflicts, and analyse the ways in which local, district and national actors manage to overcome them, by using the landscape as a functional regulatory space for policy integration. What we learn from this case is that EPI is not just designed at national levels by formally assigned policy makers, but it *happens* in landscapes where landscape actors define their priorities and set hierarchically defined policy objectives to their hand. They flexibly fit in and conform to existing rules yet informally combining these to suit their spatial context; or they entrepreneurially stretch and transform the rules, while seeking alliances with policy makers to have the outcomes institutionalised. In both cases they contribute to solving policy conflicts in both the horizontal and the vertical sense. By doing so, we show the usefulness of the framework for identifying policy conflicts and contributing to policy integration at the landscape level.

1. Introduction and aim of the article

Whereas the concept of Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) is long established (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003; Persson, 2004; Runhaar et al., 2014), landscape approaches are relatively new in their aim to effectively contribute to environmental protection by integrating agricultural production, nature conservation and livelihood options at the landscape level (e.g. Sayer et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2015). Landscape governance in particular refers to the process of spatial decision-making within the socio-ecological boundaries of place. Landscape governance is both an empirical observation and a normative idea based on the

principles of place-based multi-stakeholder dialogue, negotiation and spatial decision-making, and aims to achieve environmental, economic and social objectives simultaneously (Reed et al., 2015). While EPI has its origins in sectoral policies and assumes that coherence can be achieved through better coordination across policy domains, landscape governance is more complex, as it cuts across boundaries of sectors and scales (Buizer et al., 2016; Van Oosten, 2013, 2014). Landscape governance has attracted attention in the global debate on forest landscape restoration, which not only criticises the often observed disconnect between those who set restoration targets, and those who are to implement activities and sustain the outcomes (Holl, 2017). It also

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criticises the incoherence between sectoral policies which strive for restoration, but are implemented through fragmented governance structures and conflicting policy objectives (Scarlett et al., 2016). This is particularly the case in countries where political-administrative boundaries are arbitrary constructs, not in line with the socio-ecological processes of landscapes, leading to policy conflicts on the ground (Görg, 2007; van Oosten, 2013, 2014).

Much is known about ways to achieve policy coherence through better coordination between sectoral policies at the national level, but relatively little is known about the way in which state and non-state actors experience policy conflicts at the landscape level, and the strategies they employ to overcome these policy conflicts. This paper addresses this knowledge gap by drawing from both EPI and landscape literature, and enriching this with institutional and innovation literature, to gain new insights on how landscape actors deal with policy conflicts. By so doing, we shed light over these strategies as ‘consciously intended courses of action’, purposefully developed to overcome policy conflicts on the ground (Mintzberg, 1987). We develop an analytical framework, which we illustrate with an empirical case from Rwanda, to help us apply the framework systematically, thereby revealing how these strategies work and whether landscapes could serve as a functional space for these.

We have structured our case study around three research questions:

- 1 How do conflicting policies manifest themselves at the landscape level?
- 2 What strategies do state and non-state actors employ to address these conflicting policies?
- 3 What are the implementation logics to effectuate the strategies, and contribute to EPI?

2. Analytical framework: policy conflicts, strategies employed, and means of implementing these strategies

In this section we present our analytical framework, which is built upon four strands of the literature: EPI, landscape governance, institutional and innovation literature. We believe that their complementarity allows for better understanding of how policy integration is negotiated through multiple levels of governance, and of the role of individual landscape actors in this process.

2.1. EPI, landscape governance and policy conflicts at the landscape level

The principle of EPI refers to the incorporation of environmental concerns into other policy areas to overcome policy conflicts (Persson, 2004; Runhaar et al., 2014). In EPI literature sometimes a distinction is made between ‘procedural’ and ‘substantive’ purposes of integration (Runhaar, 2016). Following this logic we make a distinction between policy conflicts that can be substantive or procedural in nature (ibid.). Substantive conflicts are related to conflicting policy objectives, and are manifested in incompatibility between, for example, agricultural objectives of achieving food security versus forestry objectives aiming at large-scale reforestation of agricultural land. Procedural conflicts are related to the lack of transparent and participatory procedures in (spatial) decision-making. As a consequence stakeholders may not be given sufficient opportunity to put their priorities on the policy agenda, which thus can result in substantive conflicts where policy objectives from sectors and stakeholder interests do not align.

In this paper we consider landscape governance as a specific, spatial manifestation of EPI, as it aims to balance agricultural production, nature conservation and livelihood needs at the landscape level. However, landscape governance not only focuses on formal governance structures and jurisdictions (as EPI often does) but also follows the socio-ecologically defined boundaries of landscapes. This makes landscape governance more complex than EPI, as it transcends sectoral and administrative boundaries. This brings landscape governance often in

an ‘institutional void’ leading to additional policy conflicts, as there is no single legal basis for decision-making at the landscape level where multiple interpretations of jurisdictions, territorialities and boundaries overlap (Smith and Raven (2011), Hajer, 2003; Scarlett et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2017). This is problematic because of the multiple rules according to which politics and policy measures are to be agreed upon (Hajer, 2003, quoted by Wejs, 2014). From a landscape perspective, it is therefore necessary to create place-specific institutions or “new spatiality” where policy integration can be achieved (Hajer, 2003), but this can only happen if landscape actors behave creatively and entrepreneurially in order to address conflicting policies, and tailor these to the spatial realities of place. This suggests that landscapes could provide a functional space, as they are intrinsically multilevel and created by actor networks and synergies between the socio-spatial realities of place (substance) and local leadership (process). It is this socio-spatial identity that allows for integrated landscape propositions to be built, and people and politics to be reconnected to the specific characteristics of place (Görg, 2007; Scarlett et al., 2016; van Oosten et al., 2014). This is in line with Buizer et al (2015), who state that integrative processes are products of place-based actor networks that view landscapes ‘as a whole’ and that can contribute to policy integration ‘from below’ (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Buizer et al. 2015).

How should the results of integration processes be interpreted? In EPI literature this issue has been elaborated by various authors. Underdal (1980) argues that the output of successful integration is consistency in policies, which means removing contradictions between policies (both in a horizontal and vertical perspective). Horizontal consistency refers to consistency on one policy level, meaning that all executive agencies at a given policy level pursue the same policy to a given issue. Vertical consistency refers to consistency across different levels, implying consistency from (inter)national to local policies. Whereas vertical policy integration signifies administrative responsibility ‘up and down’ within one policy arena (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003), horizontal policy integration is more problematic as it is about cross-sectoral interaction, entailing the negotiation of policies between different sectors pursuing alternative sometimes conflicting objectives (ibid.). However, integration can also go a step further by trying to bring environmental objectives on equal terms with sectoral objectives (‘harmonisation’) or even by favouring environmental objectives over sectoral objectives (‘prioritisation’; Persson et al., this issue).

Too often, the rigidity of administrative and political borders and the strength of sectoral interests and preferences are too strong, leading to small-scale and partial solutions (Stead and Meijers, 2009). Whereas the process of horizontal policy integration may provide an inter-sectoral platform for conflicting policy objectives to be harmonised (Lafferty and Hovden, 2003), the problematic nature of boundary mismatch remains, and is hardly touched upon. Landscape governance therefore adds a layer to EPI, by looking at landscapes as a functional space in which inter-policy coherence, trans-territorial regimes and multilevel governance are considered simultaneously (Varone et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2017). Such a functional space requires a spatial shift from jurisdictions to, for instance, a landscape or river catchment, to better fit in place (Balsiger et al., 2015; Huitema and Meijerink, 2010). This brings us to the role of multilevel actor networks which are able to move across sectors and scales and make policy integration truly happen (Mullally and Dunphy, 2015; Runhaar et al., 2014)

2.2. Strategies of landscape actors to overcome policy conflicts at the landscape level

Landscape actors employ various strategies to overcome policy conflicts. If the conflicts are substantive, they try to get local production practice to conform to sectoral policies, and to make their own priorities fit into existing policy frames (Mintrom, 1997; Smith and Raven, 2011). When the outcome fits in and conforms to existing policy frames they can be referred to as productive and institutional ‘bricolage’, or the

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