

Anticipating landscape policy – Driving forces

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Landscape as a product

The European landscape is the product of centuries-long interaction between the physical world and human intervention. Climate change is one of the drivers in this interaction. We see that landscape has almost always been on the receiving end of physical processes and human intervention. In other words, landscape evolution is dependent on, and the expression of, a series of autonomous forces (physical and society-induced) and on policy-driven developments in other policy sectors. This can be illustrated by the fact that almost all the landscape values we now cherish so much, came about as unintended side effects.

Chance, short-sightedness, ignorance, political opportunism and other similar factors which are difficult to predict or control, have often ultimately had a decisive influence on the end product.

One positive example of this process is the Oostvaardersplassen, a forgotten corner in one of the newest polders in the Netherlands, which was occupied immediately by numerous wetland birds, and which now is one of the most precious Dutch nature reserves (Kampf, 2002). But we have also seen well-intentioned environmental policy producing negative landscape results, just to mention the numerous noise buffers and screens along our motorways.

Landscape policy in a narrow sense

Governments do not take a neutral stance and formulate policy targets for landscape, in the Netherlands e.g. laid down in the targets for conservation and development of core qualities in the National Landscapes and basic qualities for all landscape. Government interventions aimed at conservation and restoration of landscape qualities are, however, given their ambitions, generally limited in size and effectiveness (Klijn, 2004).

Cause and effect

Because landscape is dependent on other developments, whether autonomous or as part of a wider policy, landscape policy would be better served by gaining more insight into the driving forces themselves, their consequences for spatial planning, and finally, their impact on the landscape. Such insight could enable unused opportunities to be exploited and change or mitigate negative consequences at an early stage.

In considering the driving forces behind landscape development work, it is important for us to realise that:

- a) these forces influence the landscape through a series of cause and effect chains; climate change e.g. works through a multitude of effects on landscape;
- b) the real world is always subject to several driving forces at the same time, that may work together to have a cumulative effect, or conversely, slow each other down;
- c) there is not only one-way traffic from independent/dominant to dependent/subordinate; but the reverse can also be the case, i.e. determined by the landscape, for instance because of lack of space; and finally;
- d) the way these forces operate on the landscape has its own dynamics. They can have the effect of spreading slowly but surely, or work as a magnet. This is one of the aspects that determine the extent to which they can or cannot be reversed.

Climate as a driving force has impact on landscape in mainly three different ways:

- the direct effects of climate change on landscape, as a transformation of natural vegetation or the emergence of new agricultural crops;
- adaptation: measures that are being implemented to adapt to changing conditions, like flood protection measures, increasing water retention capacity, etc.
- mitigation: the landscape effects of policy measures to reduce emission of greenhouse gasses. Examples of the latter are the raising of the water table in wetland areas, the use of agricultural land for production of biofuels, and the adoption of alternative means of energy production (e.g. wind parks).

National policies on landscape

Landscape is a public commodity. This implies that public appreciation for this commodity cannot properly be expressed through the markets (Buijs *et al.*, 2006). This justifies government involvement. But it is important what role government adopts in the landscape dossier and what role it actually plays. After all, because of various initiatives, and because of its role as supervisor of new land use, the government itself is one of the most important driving forces when it comes to landscapes, and this amounts to more than specific landscape policy and the associated instruments.

The position of national governments is influenced in two directions; some people would say weakened. The first is the increasing influence of EU policy and European regulation. In addition to formal rules, the member states are requested to take more and more responsibility in the international context, for instance in the conservation of special landscapes of international significance. At the same time much of landscape policy and its implementation is being delegated to lower government authorities.

The government is then required to identify national criteria for supra-local and supra-regional interests and responsibilities and indicate what is the responsibility of national government and what is not.

At the same time, in many countries regulations are being substituted by stimulation measures. For example in the Netherlands, the government, and specifically the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, has not made it easier for itself by changing its management model, under the motto: ‘from direct intervention to indirect incentives’. Various interest groups are being encouraged to participate more and more in the development of ideas and in local solutions, and co-financing for implementation is actively sought from third parties. The Ministry is increasingly taking the position of facilitator, in contrast to its classical managerial, or at the least, directive role. Government institutions, not only the Ministry of Agriculture, often have difficulty in adapting to their changing role and this is sometimes noticeable in their reticence, even in areas that typically come under the government’s remit.

The shifting of tasks, authorisation and responsibilities certainly hold the promise of solutions better suited to the case in hand and greater involvement of the people concerned. But it also carries the risk of not always getting the priorities right and of lacking supra-local or supra-regional coherence. It must be recognised too that the absence of professionalism, and short-term thinking, coupled with a lack of knowledge, will ultimately take its toll. Because the emphasis of responsibility has shifted to lower government authorities and third parties, it has become vital to transfer knowledge and know-how. This is the responsibility of central government. But as in a relay race, where it happens that the baton is not successfully passed on, so it occurs in administrative reforms as well. The consequences of a lost race are, however, considerably less serious than the irreversible loss of landscape values.

Which conclusions can then be drawn from the administrative developments sketched above in the light of the peculiarity of landscape policy, that will allow us to better deal with landscape development in practice?

Towards a more pro-active role and long-term view

Governing means looking ahead. To make any meaningful contribution to conservation, restoration and the positive development of landscape values, it is essential to timely identify what should be done and recognise potential consequences, exploit opportunities and avert threats. A *tour d’horizon* along the possible developments that may impact on the landscape has been given by Klijn & Veeneklaas (2007). They conclude that these developments are partly autonomous in character, and thus cannot be influenced at all, or at the most, only to a small degree. But in many other cases they can be influenced. However, this almost always concerns issues where others than landscape policy – other policy sectors, other levels of administration, other players – have a dominant say. Recognising the role that others play in decision-making at an

early stage can help in establishing your own agenda and determining a strategy for consultation and collaboration, as well as in presenting your own view in the right way at the right time.

The language of others

Social change is an ongoing process, everywhere, driven by economic, demographic, socio-cultural, technological and other factors. The line of reasoning is also grounded in that vocabulary, value assessments rest on matters other than landscape quality, on, for instance, safety or economic benefit. It is always desirable to understand the interests and motives of other parties and to make the role and significance of landscape clear against this background and even in those terms. Economic arguments in particular can be useful in expressing the desirability or suitability of landscape objectives. In short, try to understand the language of others and make it your own. The reverse strategy can also be applied more often. Other parties in society, other ministries can be 'instructed' in the nature and meaning of landscape values and their role in conserving them. In the same way that thinking about and acting on sustainability seems to have become formally and informally internalised in all government departments, levels of government and the private sector, this is also conceivable when it comes to landscape quality.

And although the Dutch tax authority has to admit in its publicity that "we can't make it any more pleasant", landscape policy still holds the trump card, that actually, it can make it more pleasant.

Utilising knowledge and design

Klijn & Veeneklaas (2007) discuss a number of themes that are likely to impact on landscape in the coming decades. Knowledge development is already underway, as are various research programmes. It is therefore vital to obtain a better picture of the landscape aspects and most of all, to communicate them to those involved (Pedroli *et al.*, 2007). Making people more aware of opportunities and threats by means of early warning and early alert systems is basic.

Design can play an important supporting role here. It can serve as a verbal and visual discussion medium. To discover what it is exactly that we are talking about and what alternatives there may be. Designs are eminently suitable for a first test to see what impact interventions or developments would have on the landscape. By employing new technology, in the design and by spatial classification, designs can usefully be employed in the orientation phase. They can generate alternatives and inspire those involved to develop the project further along promising paths. Alternative designs can be assessed against various criteria and weighed against each other. In the assessment phase the various alternatives do not need to include all the effects in statistics and be given a final score. One thing, however, is certain: the perception and weight of

landscape values are so layered, so complex and so subjective that quantifying all those values objectively in assessments and decision-making is neither feasible nor sensible. Raising awareness, demonstrating consequences and offering alternatives in land use, development and management will contribute much more realistically to a discussion in which politics holds sway.

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