



Societal involvement in Natura 2000 areas

Experiences in Denmark, England and Germany



Since 2013, involving society in nature conservation has become an explicit ambition of the Dutch government. As neighbouring countries of the Netherlands have similar ambitions, this research reviewed the policies in these countries and the experiences gained in three study areas: Exmoor National Park (England); Naturpark Aukrug (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) and Lille Vildmose (Denmark). The research shows that early engagement of local stakeholders, a motivating narrative, equality in cooperation, flexibility of subsidies and presence of local brokers are important elements of successful governance aimed at involving society.

Introduction

National governments want to increase societal involvement in the care of Natura 2000 areas, partly in reaction to contested designation of the areas. It has also become one of the explicit ambitions of the Dutch government (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2013 & 2014). In Dutch parliamentary debates since 2010, politicians have called for more attention to be given to the people who live and work in these areas. In the Nature Vision (Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2014), there is a demand for finding new and better ways to integrate Natura 2000 in the regional economies and to communicate the benefits and economic advantages of Natura 2000. It is a challenge to open the mindsets of professionals to nature images and initiatives that citizens have. Another topic of discussion is to enable more agricultural management and ownership, mostly in the areas surrounding Natura 2000 areas, as an alternative to public land purchase.

Following these discussions, societal involvement in Natura 2000 in this research relates to three themes that ask for involvement of specific societal groups. Firstly, how

Natura 2000 sites can contribute to regional economies (asking for liaisons with entrepreneurs), secondly, how to organise and finance nature management together with societal actors (liaisons with landowners and farmers) and, thirdly, how to allow more bottom-up participation and citizen initiatives (liaisons with the wider public and communities).

PBL (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) requested Alterra (part of Wageningen University and Research Centre) to review experiences with societal involvement in Natura 2000 areas in neighbouring countries, in order to learn lessons for improvement of societal involvement in the Dutch Natura 2000 dossier. This WOt-paper summarises the results of this research, which was carried out in 2014, in which the national policies for societal involvement in Natura 2000 areas were reviewed in England, Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) and Denmark. We did a quick scan based on the most important literature and policy documents available. Furthermore, experiences with societal involvement were studied in more detail in areas with Natura 2000 sites: Exmoor National Park

(England), Naturpark Aukrug (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) and Lille Vildmose (Denmark). Interviews with involved stakeholders were held and analysis of documentation on the areas was conducted.

Analytical approach of the research

Recently, there has been a shift of focus towards the participation of society in the care of public goods and services (e.g. Pestoff, 2006; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Bovaid, 2007). Relating to nature this can be captured with the term 'environmental citizenship'. Environmental citizenship can be defined as the notion that individuals take responsibility for their own interaction with the environment (Dobson and Bell, 2006). Societal involvement in this sense means not only participating in decision making, but also in caring for a public good, in this case 'nature and natural values'. In this research, governance of societal involvement refers to processes in which not only governments but also societal actors make decisions about Natura 2000 goals and management and an emphasis is placed on stimulating and allowing societal action.

The following research questions were principal in the project:

- Which approaches do governments apply in order to govern societal involvement (relating to the three actor groups and themes) in Natura 2000 areas?
 - What are the motivations of authorities for increasing societal involvement?
 - Which actors are involved and what are the motivations of these societal actors for becoming involved?
 - What are the storylines that are shared amongst societal actors and authorities?
 - Which instruments are in place for facilitating involvement?
 - How do governments and societal actors interact?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the governance of societal involvement?
- Which policy lessons can be learned?

The analysis of the cases is loosely based on the concept of governance arrangements (Arts & Leroy, 2006). Governance arrangements can be defined as relatively stable structures and processes, within which societal and state actors address policy challenges. In the analysis of societal involvement in the Natura 2000 areas, four aspects of governance arrangements are employed: *the motivation of the actors, storylines, instruments* and *(style of) interaction*. The first element in an arrangement is actors and their motives. We examined which actors are involved (both public service agents and societal actors) and what their motives are to involve or to be involved. The second element is the storylines that bind professionals and public officials with societal co-producers. Storytelling is a way of ordering and constructing shared meaning (Boyce, 1996). In

arrangements for Natura 2000 an important aspect is how goals and stories of professionals are connected to those of societal actors, as an often heard criticism of Natura 2000 is that the storylines are too technical to be appealing. The third element is the instruments. We look at instruments that authorities that we distinguish implement in order to enable and stimulate societal involvement. The fourth element is the (style of) interaction between actors: which formal and informal structures and attitudes are put into place in order to evoke and enable societal action?

We examine the results of the governance in relation to the extent to which societal involvement and delivery are reached, according to the following aspects:

- The arrangement triggers societal involvement in decision making and care for the area.
- The arrangement includes societal identities and stories in its storyline.
- The arrangement is responsive to local practices and initiatives.
- The arrangement is accessible for societal actors.
- The arrangement allows societal actors to obtain economic or societal benefits while reaching public goals.
- Societal actors contribute to nature conservation.
- Societal actors contribute to the finance of the arrangement.
- Societal actors contribute to societal/publicly shared benefits, other than nature conservation.

Country and site selection; good cases to learn from

We selected the three countries/regions that have similarities with the Netherlands based on some general criteria, such as mixed ownership, mixed land use and similar land use pressures; the same biogeographical region and a relatively similar policy context. As we wanted to learn from good experiences, we chose cases that have gained experiences in the topics of societal involvement that we are interested in: stimulating regional economies, bottom-up participation and shared management. Based on the analysis of the cases, we were able to show which factors, according to our respondents, contributed to the results in terms of delivery and involvement in the cases. We were then able to generate attention points for policy makers from these cases.

National policies for Natura 2000 and societal involvement

In England, Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark, the strategies for the planning and management of protected areas and in particular Natura 2000 sites have been subject to changes in recent years.

In Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, the designation process of Natura 2000 areas created much tension. In order to overcome this tension and to ensure that the local population and other relevant stakeholders are involved



Recreation in Natura 2000 sites contributes to the local economy.

in the management planning process of the sites, there is a standardised process for drafting management plans in all areas (Boller *et al.*, 2013). This approach aims to avoid conflicts by ensuring a transparent participatory approach. In areas with a high chance of conflicts occurring, the responsibility for management plans can be delegated to a local organisation, through the establishment of 'Lokale Aktionsgruppen' in which a local organisation is responsible for development of management plans for Natura 2000 sites (Boller *et al.*, 2013; Amstblatt für Schleswig-Holstein, 2007).

In England, many of the Natura 2000 sites were already protected through the UK system of protected areas (as Sites of Special Scientific Interest - SSSI) prior to Natura 2000. Because of the incorporation of the existing system, the designation of Natura 2000 did not involve extensive participatory processes with a wide range of actors. More recently in England, ideas about the 'Big Society' have entered the world of nature conservation, with an emphasis on community powers and volunteerism, support for social enterprises, and a more open and transparent government. The national policy is based on the assumption that biodiversity provides an excellent case for the Big Society and the goal is to reach more people and increase their engagement in biodiversity issues (Defra, 2011). In addition, less government spending on nature policy led to reorganisation of public bodies, who have had to deal with less staff, for example for Natural England and the National Parks Authorities. These budget cuts have motivated public bodies to focus on ways of increasing the responsibility, financial and otherwise, of societal actors for nature.

The government in Denmark also recognises, in the Natura 2000 dossier, that closer dialogue and stakeholder participation are necessary. The government has

acknowledged that the 'first generation' of management plans for these sites did not generate trust and goodwill among private landowners. The involvement of so many public authorities, public and private landowners and other private stakeholders also justifies a stronger focus on dialogue and collaboration (Ministry of Environment, 2011). In order to activate this broad range of actors and stimulate them to generate more joint solutions, a Green Progress Forum has been set up at the national level. By establishing the forum, involved stakeholders are in the forefront of all parts of the development of the Natura 2000 planning and implementation. The forum follows the Natura 2000 planning closely and suggests improvements. If required the platform can also organise meetings at the regional level.

Despite the more participatory approach in all countries since the designation of the sites, the conservation objectives set for the Natura 2000 sites are still standing unchallenged. Overall in all three countries there is an effort towards sharing more responsibility in decision-making in relation to management and the care of nature, which is the result of different developments in each country (in Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein it is more due to problems with public support for Natura 2000 specifically; in England this also relates to general political developments). In the following sections we will present our analysis to identify how societal involvement is stimulated and organised in the case studies.

Results from the study areas

Naturpark Aukrug

Naturpark Aukrug is located in the middle of Schleswig-Holstein, about 30 km north of Hamburg. The Naturpark is approximately 380 km². Within the Naturpark there are nine Natura 2000 sites of two types: 1) forest with



remnants of heath lands and 2) streams and their banks ('Auen' in German). Within the area most of the agricultural land is privately owned but several of the banks of the streams as well as parts of the old forests have been purchased by two nature conservation foundations which are active in the whole of Schleswig-Holstein: the Kurt und Erica Schrobach Stiftung and the Stiftung Naturschutz Schleswig-Holstein. In order to establish successful nature projects together with the local people, the Naturschutzring Aukrug e.V was founded in 2001. The organisation is active in the Naturpark Aukrug and its surroundings and is now a 'Lokale Aktionsgruppe' responsible for the drafting of the Natura 2000 management plans in the area, for executing management measures on a voluntary basis as well as assisting local owners to apply for subsidies. The core idea of the NSR Aukrug is that local residents are responsible for nature conservation and that the best results are achieved if co-operation is sought between the different parties (www.naturschutzring-aukrug.de).

Exmoor National Park

Exmoor National Park is a 693 km² landscape of moorland, woodland, valleys and farmland in South West England. Exmoor was designated as a National Park in 1954. Two Natura 2000 sites are within the park boundaries: Exmoor Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods SAC. A National Parks Authority was established in 1997 as

a single purpose authority. It works in partnership with local councils, other public sector organisations and businesses to 'try to ensure a viable, vibrant and sustainable community'. The National Parks Authority is also a landowner in Exmoor. The organisation Natural England is responsible for the designation of the SACs and for arranging environmental schemes for the many farmers and private landowners who manage land in Exmoor (mainly through the system of protected areas in England, the SSSI system). In 2012, a new management plan for the whole park was created, involving a wide range of stakeholders, the Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan, 2012 – 2017, which replaced the previous management plan (Exmoor National Park, 2012). The new plan addresses societal involvement as a main theme and has three key priorities for partnership action: 'a thriving landscape', 'connecting people and places' and 'towards a sustainable future'. With regard to bottom-up initiatives and participation, the National Park Authority provides a National Park Partnership Fund, which is a grant funding programme that seeks to invest in good ideas and projects that will help to achieve National Park purposes (Exmoor National Park, 2014). The fund is open to communities, voluntary organisations, businesses and individuals.

Lille Vildmose, Denmark

Lille Vildmose in East Himmerland is presented as a paradise for nature lovers and those with historical

Table 1: Short overview of the basic characteristics of the cases

Societal involvement Natura 2000	Naturpark Aukrug, Schleswig-Holstein	Exmoor National Park, England	Lille Vildmose, Denmark
Short description	Local organisation is in charge of management plans for Natura 2000, involving landowners.	The park created a multi stakeholder management plan and co-finances local initiatives.	Collaborative process in order to achieve support for nature protection.
Scale of the site	The area in which the organisation is active is approx. 380 km ² . The total surface of the sites is 10 km ² .	Area covers 693 km ² and includes two Natura 2000 sites.	76 km ² . Denmark's largest protected land area.
Type of landscape	Mixed agricultural forest landscape.	Moorland, woodland, valleys, farmland.	Moorland and woodland.
Type of land ownership	Private ownership (landowners and NGOs).	Some large areas are owned by some large (public and private) landowners; the remaining land is privately owned.	Mixed ownership (state and private).
Characterisation of societal involvement	Shared management with landowners.	Inviting societal initiatives.	Balancing interests of nature and society through participation.

interests. The area is Denmark's largest protected land area (76 km²) and it has been a Natura 2000 area since 1998. Lille Vildmose has Northwest Europe's largest raised bog and unique natural and grazed forests. Species like golden eagles, wild boar, red deer, otters and other large animals can be enjoyed. This area used to be an important cultural-historical area due to the peat extraction that was an important source of employment in the last century. The Nature Agency is the authority in charge, but the daily management is in the hands of a public-private partnership consisting of Aage V. Jensen Nature Foundation (also the biggest landowner), the Municipality of Aalborg, and the Nature Agency Denmark. This partnership takes care of the daily management, nature maintenance and restoration works. Much of the public relations are taken care of by a Visitor Centre. The effort to protect the area increased and led to the application of a Life+ project in 2010. By then, local farmers were protesting because the government offered them insufficient compensation for the increasing restrictions. Within this framework the Life+ project emerges as a public-private collaboration for the benefit of nature protection and balancing other interests, such as the economic interests of farmers (ECNC, 2012; Nature Agency, 2010).

Comparison of arrangements for societal involvement in the three cases

Actors and their motivations

Motivations for authorities to increase societal involvement

All authorities in the three cases consider increased involvement of societal groups as a way of avoiding conflict between government and society, often in response to earlier resistance that occurred by imposing

policy on stakeholders. Other motivations of authorities are to alleviate budget cuts, dependency on local actors for the undertaking of management activities and a wish to contribute to the local society. For instance in Aukrug, authorities depend on landowners for the management of nature. This is an important motivation for the authorities to involve landowners not only in decision-making processes but also in management schemes. In England, the Exmoor authorities are interested in involving society in response to cuts in government funding and staff; this makes it important to make the work for the park more of a collective effort with societal actors sharing both work and finance. In Exmoor the National Park Authority is also motivated to aid communities in a broader sense. This leads to wider activities, such as to co-fund projects with economic or societal goals. In Lille Vildmose, cooperation with societal actors is motivated largely by the need to bridge past differences. Especially local small farmers opposed to the nature project because of restrictions of their rights and farming. Furthermore, in Lille Vildmose and Exmoor, public access for visitors and tourists is an important way of achieving public support.

Motivations for societal actors to become involved

The motivations for societal actors to be actively engaged in the three Natura 2000 areas show a large degree of variation. Four main motivations could be discerned:

- The prospect of governmental subsidy in order to mitigate negative impacts on income is a motive to be involved in decision-making and actual management in all the cases. This motivation is found predominantly amongst landowners (often farmers). Landowners want to influence decision-making about the area in order to possibly minimise their income loss (all cases) and become involved in nature and landscape management in order to be compensated for income loss. The fear of

income loss has often been the source of major conflicts in the past.

- Opportunities for new ways of creating value for economic or societal benefits. This motivation is shared by a diverse constellation of countryside actors, farmers, other businesses and citizens, each with different types of involvement. In general farmers may increasingly see management subsidies as a contribution to their businesses, for example in Aukrug, where management schemes are adaptable to fit in with their business. The cases show signs of developments such as the future value of local produce to the economy. Thus, in Lille Vildmose, local agrarian production is increasingly branded as a Lille Vildmose-brand. In Aukrug, local society groups are set up to manage conservation areas using cattle and selling their meat (Aukrug: ERNA, VERA). Another example is provided by communities in Exmoor who collectively manage woodland as this provides them with wood as a cheaper, alternative energy source to fossil fuel. In Exmoor, the tourism industry is involved in branding (see the section on instruments). Furthermore, private actors in Exmoor propose projects (looking for co-funding) motivated by economic goals, such as the restoration of a traditional boat which enables an operator to continue to carry out boat trips in Exmoor; or a project that aims to develop a seasonal minibus tour for disabled and elderly (National Park Authority, 2014). There are also many examples of societal actors, such as artists or archaeological groups who are active in Exmoor with motives that relate less to economic benefits, but whose societal motives are well combined with the nature purpose of the areas.
- Regional identity and pride. There are rural landowners and other stakeholders that become involved because they take pride in their own land or feel responsible for the area and have the drive to be involved in matters concerning their land, including those of

nature management (the NSR Aukrug in Germany and Exmoor England). This can also lead to activities, such as opening their land for visitors or events (Exmoor) or involvement in projects with wider community development goals (Exmoor). In Lille Vildmose, enhancing local engagement and pride is now becoming an increasingly important aspect of the work.

- Protection of nature for its intrinsic value. Another group of actors in the three cases consists of NGOs and foundations, with primary nature conservation purposes. Private foundations in Lille Vildmose and Aukrug participate in decision-making and buying and managing land. Another group of actors that feel responsible for nature conservation are volunteers with motives such as leisure, physical exercise, social engagement or academic interest (Exmoor and Lille Vildmose). They carry out conservation work, monitoring and survey activities.

Storylines

Storylines which are tailor-made for the area play an important role in engaging societal actors. In Lille Vildmose and Aukrug, these stories centre on the importance of the conservation of nature. In Aukrug the emphasis is on local residents being responsible for nature conservation, with a sense of local ownership of the area as an alternative to a nature designation being imposed on the area from 'far away' authorities. Local responsibility and participation are the core of this story, the essence of which is about shared ownership of nature. Lille Vildmose is presented as a paradise for nature lovers and those with historical interests. Here, the story is positive, but at the same time there is a second story that resistance is futile and acceptance is the only way forward as the nature designation won't go away. The story that is being developed to achieve increased acceptance is that nature is also a source of well-being and that it can contribute to the economy.



A small stream in Naturpark Aukrug.



Most of the agricultural land in Naturpark Aukrug is privately owned.

In Exmoor, the storyline is that the National Park Authority and societal partners share the responsibility for keeping Exmoor National Park special and for meeting the needs and well-being of local communities. There is an effort, through the partnership working method, to remove the feeling that landowners have of being restricted and to communicate that, although Exmoor is a natural area, it is also a living and working area in which economic development takes place. This story is meant to trigger societal engagement in a broader sense than nature conservation. Besides this story, a technical story about the nature quality of designated areas is still being shared between professionals.

Included in the stories of Exmoor and Aukrug is a vision of governance as coproduction and a collective effort, in which authorities are merely guiding societal initiatives instead of imposing policy on others. It is important to note that European designations and Natura 2000, as such, play a limited to non-existent role in these stories.

Instruments

Financial instruments, in particular subsidies for activities by citizens or for nature and landscape management by landowners, are important instruments for engaging society. In Naturschutzring Aukrug (NSR Aukrug) these are tailor-made agri-environmental schemes for the region, which are more flexible than the national schemes and thus offer landowners more opportunities to incorporate them in their business. The Natura 2000 designation is part of the reason for providing subsidies, although in communications the importance of Natura 2000 tends to be played down.

The other side of the story is that societal actors contribute financially to the activities in the nature areas. Societal engagement is needed because of a lack of government funding, which makes mobilisation of private

money important. In Aukrug a private foundation partly funds the activities of the NSK Aukrug. In Exmoor, the National Parks Partnership Fund, which the National Parks Authority uses to co-finance societal projects that contribute to the park's goals, is stimulating societal finance. It means projects are always carried out with combined sources of finance. In Lille Vildmose there is private funding through the Aage V. Jensen Fund. In Exmoor there are also small scale experiments with voluntary contributions by society, such as the Care More scheme, which asks visitors to pay a small amount of money. This is arranged through businesses such as hotels, but organisations who organise an event also put aside a small amount of their fee for the park.

Styles of interaction

Much effort is put into the organisation of societal involvement through individual and often informal contacts between landowners and professionals (Aukrug and Lille Vildmose). In Aukrug, informal cooperation, trust building and knowing each other well is an important feature of these contacts. In Lille Vildmose, there is also investment in more frequent informal meetings between authorities and farmers and other landowners, as a response to earlier conflicts. Exmoor National Park is establishing strategic partnership groups around different themes in order to structure the contribution of societal actors as delivery partners of the new partnership plan. These groups develop project proposals and bid for the partnership fund. Staff is employed to guide the proposals. In all cases, collaboration runs through a mix of formal and informal collaboration.

Societal involvement is also institutionalised into the governance structure of the organising authorities. For example NSK Aukrug is a membership organisation supported by local and regional authorities; and the



Public information panel on Natura 2000 in Naturpark Aukrug.

Exmoor National Park Authority has (political) members, who are based in the communities. In Lille Vildmose the project is led by a public private collaboration. In addition, the management consists of staff members from both the national level (the Nature Agency) and the local level (the municipality).

Strengths and weaknesses of the governance of societal involvement

Several explanations for the success of the governance to involve societal actors were provided by respondents. Below we list some explanatory factors that have contributed to results in terms of involvement and delivery.

- The local presence of informal contact between professionals and societal actors was essential for building trust and to trigger societal involvement in decision-making and care for the areas.
- Inclusion of societal identities and stories in the storylines was achieved by widening the scope of the storyline from a nature focus to one involving social-economic and community aspects (to be developed with stakeholders). This helped societal actors who do not have purposes to do with nature to come forward and get involved based on their own motives.
- Flexibility in instruments is a government intervention that increased societal contributions to nature conservation and management, for example adapting management schemes to wishes of landowners. The flexibility contributed to accessibility of the instrument for societal actors.
- An attitude of authorities towards assisting communities and landowners to deliver their own initiatives instead of authorities imposing policy on actors helped to shift the responsibility more towards society.
- In creating responsiveness to local practices and initiatives, it was helpful to allocate (co)funds to societal

projects with multiple goals; this improves the chance of societal actors contributing to their own as well as the area's economic or societal goals.

- Financial contributions of societal actors could largely be explained by the motives of these actors, such as regional identity and pride, their land ownership or an intrinsic wish to protect nature.

In the governance arrangements, respondents described several weaknesses and challenges of societal involvement.

- The approach of investing in the existence of a local organisation or individuals that have the knowledge, skills, competence and contacts in the area to act as a successful broker, creates dependence on the right people and is time consuming due to the personal approach and trust building that is required.
- Convincing local landowners to support the nature policy is an ongoing process, and therefore requires continuous informal dialogue (kitchen table talks). The challenge is to ensure that nature goals guide the dialogue but without a detailed plan and to allow for the landowner to have an influence on the outcomes. The effect of the approach may be progress in the relationship with farmers, but benefits for nature, society or the economy may not be realised in the short term.
- In our cases, societal involvement contributed to the delivery of nature conservation, for example management of the areas, conservation work and monitoring activities. However, the extent of this contribution varies between the cases and between societal activities.

Lessons from the cases

In this section, lessons from the cases on how to govern societal involvement in Natura 2000 areas are drawn for policy makers in the Netherlands as well as other member states. The lessons are related to the themes of discussion over societal involvement in the Netherlands: (i) how Natura 2000 sites can contribute to regional economies, (ii) how to organise and finance nature management together with societal actors, and (iii) how to allow more bottom-up participation and citizen initiatives (see also Key Success Factors textbox).

A general lesson from the cases is that Natura 2000 should not be seen as an isolated policy but be part of an integrated approach in which more goals and societal wishes are included. More specifically, we generated three lessons from our cases.

Lesson 1: *Emphasise the social and economic story of the Natura 2000 sites, as part of a larger region*

In order to promote societal inclusiveness, it is necessary to limit or downplay the technical story about nature conservation rules and regulations and instead highlight



The coastline in Exmoor National Park.

Key success factors from the cases

Aukrug

- The Natura 2000 management plans have been embedded in the wider spatial context of the area.
- A local organisation with the required knowledge, skills, competence and contacts acted as a successful broker.

Exmoor

- The partnership plan and fund have been a way to open up to the ideas of others and to help them to execute these ideas, instead of the national parks authority functioning mainly as the sole executive agency.
- Inviting societal projects that have social and economic goals leads to an involved society.

Lille Vildmose

- After a period of resistance, the key success factor was to take societal actors seriously and to integrate their ideas and, where possible, the societal actors themselves into the planning process, without providing them with any right of veto.
- Engagement has been rewarded and produced commitment.

the societal story to the public. Early engagement of a wider range of societal actors, including entrepreneurs, is increasingly important. It is useful to develop a storyline that presents a wider scope of the Natura 2000 area and its surroundings, including economic goals, leisure and other societal goals. People are then more inclined to develop a sense of joint ownership and a more deeply felt support and it may lead to initiatives with societal and economic goals. Whether such initiatives will actually contribute to new economic development of the areas is yet unclear. In our cases, private parties and companies contribute financially to the areas and the management thereof, and we see the beginning of some experiences of mutual benefit as a

result of this engagement, for example with branding local agrarian products in Lille Vildmose or the tourism industry in Exmoor. In relation to integration in regional economies, we particularly recommend that the ties with local companies be strengthened. For example, in the Netherlands, this process is already happening in several Dutch sites (nature area Tiengemeten, National Parks), where companies have been asked to become involved in nature. This is a good development, because in the past the overall perception was that processes of management and planning are dominated by professionals and focus on technical ecological or hydrological issues.

Lesson 2: *Invest in intermediate organisations that act as local and regional brokers for the purpose of stimulating dialogue, developing practical arrangements, and enabling new types of contact.*

Our cases show that enhancing the involvement of societal actors means employing local knowledge and presence in the area, which creates a process of trust building. In the Netherlands, as well as other member states, it might be useful to entrust the planning and delivery of Natura 2000 management to local brokers, especially in areas where conflict occurred or implementation of measures is proving difficult. In relation to the theme of how to organise and finance nature management together with societal actors, such an approach should include efforts to provide flexibility in funding mechanisms, in particular agri-environmental schemes. In our cases the provision of different levels of flexibility (in duration of contracts and type of measures) in agri-environmental schemes works as a mechanism for getting local landowners involved. It may be useful for policymakers to explore further possibilities for tailor made management contracts with farmers and landowners for nature management, as is happening in a few provinces in the Netherlands (Kuindersma *et al.*, 2015). It would be interesting to

assess if and how the flexibility for individual farmers in applying agri-environmental measures can be achieved.

Lesson 3: Develop an approach for Natura 2000 areas that generates societal projects

From our cases, we have learned that it is useful to develop a separate strategy that, by the development of relevant tools and instruments, assists in the generation of societal projects and bottom-up initiatives. It seems important to value societal contributions to the areas even if they do not have nature conservation as a core purpose. Not all societal contributions are and should be expected to contribute to nature goals. Our cases show that it is helpful to establish funds that co-finance ideas and initiatives from and carried out by society. These funds may exceed the boundaries of Natura 2000 areas. Also, it is recommended to make use of the expertise of organisations that specialise in guiding volunteers, citizen initiatives and education. The activities of such organisation may not be primarily focused on Natura 2000 areas. Were these organisations to become responsible for activities in Natura 2000 areas, this could contribute to more societal activity in the sites.

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