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Governance of natural landscapes: challenges and success factors for landscape management in the Netherlands

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The field of landscape management has changed in recent years under influence of societal changes. Formerly, the management of Dutch natural landscapes was organised in a centralised and hierarchical manner: governmental institutions developed new policies, others executed them. The national government was, for example, responsible for developing national policy that formed a framework for municipalities. Subsequently, the Dutch Forestry Commission and other nature and landscape organisations would execute these policies. In this process for example volunteers and local farmers would be involved, again in a very hierarchical way. This policy structure is referred to as government, whereas the modern day landscape management shows more characteristics of governance. Governance is understood in this paper as a decentralised and cooperative way of working, in which multiple actors are involved in both creating and executing policies. Both public and private organisations and volunteers work together in networks with a focus on a landscape project or policy issue. In this non-hierarchical structure parties share responsibilities, instead of confirming to a pre-set policy. It should be noted, however, that the degree to which governance configurations are (de-)centralised and (in-)formal can vary significantly. The key challenge is to establish governance configurations that are fit for their purpose in the context in which they are applied. The aim of this paper is to present lessons learned about the challenges and success factors for a process to create shared responsibility for landscape management.

It seems that hierarchical ways of working may not be the most effective way to deal with complex problems such as climate change adaptation or loss of biodiversity (Marion, 2008; Schneider and Somers, 2006). Since public support for landscape policies decreased as well, new governance structures have emerged on different levels and in different contexts. These solutions require a multi-disciplinary approach with a shared responsibility in order to be successful. This creates an interdependency amongst partners due to the distribution of expertise, finances, power, and manpower across various actors. As a result roles are shifting, accountability becomes blurry and new competencies are necessary. Governments and nature organisations need to anticipate to the shifting of roles and build up the required competencies.

Governance structures at different levels

Governance takes shape at both the local and the regional level in the management of natural landscapes. Rooted in government structures, volunteers are involved in maintaining natural areas at a local level. In the past years these initiatives have grown to become self-supporting groups with new

ideas and needs. Besides the evolution of these volunteer groups, different forms of governance have developed on other levels as well. On the one hand nature conservation organisations are becoming partners in local social initiatives. At the regional level, on the other hand, mainly professional organisations such as municipalities, water boards and nature conservation organisations cooperate. They sometimes also involve semi-volunteer organisations to represent the interest of farmers for example. In this paper, we will describe the lessons for landscape management that are learned from two cases in the Netherlands that are currently being studied:

1. Regional coalition Vechtdal, a case that has been selected to illustrate governance at a regional level.
2. Communities of Natuurmonumenten: a case that has been selected to illustrate governance at a local level.

Core to governance structures is self-organisation. When analysing governance processes to create shared responsibility for landscape management, one needs to take into account the interaction between partners (Rhodes, 2000), the balance between accountability and authority (Hajes & Wagenaar, 2003) and the importance of 'soft values' such as trust and consensus (Van Tatenhove & Leroy, 1995) which is created while facilitating and coordinating a network. A framework for transition governance (Rijke et al., 2012) will be applied to analyse to which extent the required ingredients for sustainable landscape management are present in the cases. They are used to explain the differences in the two cases as well. From this comparative analysis we draw lessons for landscape management in the Netherlands. Finally, we relate our findings to other research findings about governance of social-ecological systems.

Case 1: Regional Coalition Vechtdal

Since 1994, the Agricultural Nature Conservation Association 'Ommemarke' has developed local initiatives to take care of the agricultural landscape. Due to policy changes aiming to strengthen local participation, their responsibilities have however become more formal. As a result of that, the Regional Coalition Vechtdal (Gebiedscoalitie Vechtdal) was founded at the start of 2016. Cooperation with professional organisations such as municipalities, the regional river adaptation programme (Ruimte voor de Vecht) and nature conservation organisations is key in this initiative. These organisations are at the same time keen on cooperating with farmer organisations as they depend on these mediating organisations when they need farmer support for their policies. A shared interest in the management of the rural landscape is clear. The path to cooperating, however, not so much, which makes them struggle with facilitating this initiative.

Case 2: Communities of Natuurmonumenten

For decades the Dutch Society for preservation of nature monuments (Natuurmonumenten) has involved volunteers in the management and maintenance of nature reserves under their responsibility. By forming a new strategic direction, the organisation hopes to adapt to societal changes in a more sustainable way by managing nature together instead of for people. Natuurmonumenten now uses different ways of cooperating with other parties and citizens at a local level, and mostly focused at their own nature reserves. So called communities are a way to give social initiatives and other organisations room to explore opportunities in the reserves. They not only focus on improving the quality of the physical environment, but also on that of the social relationships in the area. The challenges they face are balancing the power that is related to land ownership and the aim to share responsibilities and support initiatives from 'others'. Natuurmonumenten realises that to a certain extent it is also dependent on other parties to unfold conservation activities.

Preliminary findings

The research thus far enables us to identify at least three important factors that influence the success of governance projects at different levels. First of all, the cases confirm our initial assumption that the role and status of governmental agencies and nature organisations clearly changes under influence of these societal changes. They are an equal partner in the cooperation, which challenges the predictable hierarchical relationship that comes with land ownership. It does, however, also offer opportunities, since being part of the cooperation causes non-involved parties to treat nature organisations in a less opposing way. Governments, but also citizens, may be more willing to adopt plans that are supported by a wider group of people. Secondly, the way the cooperation is set up is of crucial importance. The

initiating organisation needs to be well rooted in the region in order to identify the right partners. The way the goals and values of all partners need to be weighed, sustaining a non-hierarchical relationship. The makeup and size of the group, as well as the lead and its qualities are essential. Lastly, developing governance projects in this quickly-changing society requires an awareness of learning processes and the facilitation of group learning. The group itself, as well as the participating organisations and individuals need awareness of this.

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