

Editorial

Rural Landscapes—Challenges and Solutions to Landscape Governance

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Introduction

Rural landscape dynamics are challenging existing policy regimes for a number of reasons and new approaches to landscape governance are needed. The underlying driving forces for rural landscape change, such as agricultural developments, urbanisation in various forms including counter-urbanisation and tourism, and public policy interventions of various kinds, are increasingly interlinked and globalised [1]. Policy interventions function at multiple levels across several sectors [2,3]. Some domains have been de-regulated, such as agricultural policies [4]; others have expanded, such as nature conservation and natural resource policies [5]; still others have been decentralised, such as land-use planning [6]—all adding to the complexity of change and regulation. Finally, rural communities themselves have changed due to various combinations of in- and out-migrations; besides the dynamics created by novel social and demographic compositions, they often find themselves locked in between increasing influence from outside forces and internal social and cultural segregation [3].

On a more general level, Emerson and Nabatchi point out two reasons why collaborative governance has gained currency [7]. First, the problems to tackle are increasingly wicked, they may not be very precisely defined (‘rural development’ for example), and solutions are far from simple in line with the complexity patterns described above. The contribution of Busscher et al. in this Special Issue on land grabbing in Argentina clearly shows the intricacy of the ongoing processes [8]. The second reason has to do with changes within the public agencies towards more market-oriented approaches, shrinking budgets and reduced public service, which leave the provision of public services to networks rather than specific public bodies. Emerson and Nabatchi [7] define collaborative governance as “public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” [7] (p. 18). In the context of this Special Issue, we understand landscape governance as processes and institutions involving an array of stakeholders (public and non-public) in the management of land use, landscape features and rights in a specific landscape, whether local or regional in scale.

We recognise a growing interest in establishing frameworks of different kinds that may support collaborative activities aiming for greater integration of interests and management of conflicts in the landscape, and several examples are given in the papers in this Special Issue. Concerning practices related to sustainable farming and forestry, so-called ‘landscape approaches’ have been suggested to enable inclusive and integrative governance of land use and landscape management [9,10]. Collaboration across individual property lines, the introduction of a learning dimension in management,

strengthening of the resilience of the landscape, consensus building, multifunctionality and clarification of rights and duties are important dimensions of a landscape approach [9]. However, Sayer et al. are not very explicit when it comes to how to combine these principles in practice. Arts et al. suggest a multifunctional approach to landscape governance that links the dimensions of ecosystem, place and scale in ways that enable interpretation, negotiation and consensus formation [10]. Swaffield et al. present an array of approaches to better linkage of agricultural businesses with landscape sustainability including models for provenance, co-governance and placemaking [11]. Papers in this Special Issue address the landscape approach in different ways. An emphasis on the biophysical aspects of landscapes founded in landscape ecological principles is used as the starting point for a more top-down planning approach in the case of the agricultural landscapes in the Taiga Zone [12]. The paper of Angelstam et al. illustrates how a landscape approach may contribute to sustainable use of the primaeval forests, combining insights of the forest history with knowledge of the stakeholders to formulate different planning objectives [13]. The case study from Estonia by Storie et al. describes placemaking as a way to create linkages between people and the area where they live, identify tensions between different groups and solve existing conflicts [14]. The case study from Northern Mors [15] may be considered as a combination of the two landscape approaches of Sayer et al. and Arts et al. [9,10].

In this Special Issue, we address how combinations of drivers, including combinations of change perspectives affecting today's landscapes, are challenges within rural landscape governance. Based on literature reviews and empirical studies, we address these questions: How are the key actors in present-day landscapes coping with the change processes and the resulting governance challenges? What general challenges can be identified and what characterise these challenges?

The papers provide an array of illustrations and insights into the challenges of rural landscape governance. For simplicity, we will discuss these challenges in relation to two overall aspects that are—or should be—present in any practical governance context: conflict management and placemaking [3,16].

Key Stakeholders and Overall Conditions

In any given landscape governance context, an array of stakeholders are of relevance, from primary landscape managers to different communities and public agencies across sectors and political-administrative levels.

The primary landscape managers, those who have the formal, legal rights to manage the land and to take decisions concerning land use changes, are key stakeholders in most contexts. They include first of all farmers, foresters and other land owners as well as public bodies who own land such as national parks and nature reserves. Public agencies of various kinds have the right to regulate landscape practices by using different public policy tools. A major challenge in landscape governance is to bring these two types of competences in resonating relationships, as we can see in many examples in this Special Issue. Other significant stakeholders are village communities, nature conservation groups, local farmer associations or other types of associations, such as rural development, hunting, outdoor recreation and heritage associations. These stakeholders to varying degrees have engaged interests in the landscape and also have the power to influence policy decisions, which are two characteristics of principal stakeholders [17].

Collaborative landscape governance is a way to integrate the different visions, interests and stakes. It is in the mutual relationships between the primary landscape manager, the local community in various forms or other communities, and the public agency that collaborative landscape governance can function in practice [18]. Depending on the context, other stakeholders including museums, schools, tour operators, regular visitors or urban citizens as consumers or recreational groups should also be considered to be key stakeholders, as well as being influential individuals of various kinds. However, it is often difficult up front to identify those who have an engaged interest in the future of the landscape—whether it is functionally linked with management practice of properties or the interests are more oriented towards public goods such as a parish community [16]. The same goes for influence; it may be something the stakeholder gains during a collaborative process and not something which is

given from the start. Therefore the consideration of the key stakeholders should be left as open as possible at the start of such a process.

The inclusion of the relevant stakeholders needs to be taken into consideration. Processes of collaborative landscape governance are often led by specific groups or leaders. The more inclusive they manage to be, the more they will be able to challenge and change the status quo truly. However, there is a risk that some groups may not be involved in the process and may be left outside, because they are not aware of their role in the landscape or of the changes that are ongoing in their landscape. Thus specific attention must be given to those people who may potentially be excluded by a biased process or/and auto-exclusion.

Furthermore, to fully understand the contemporary challenges of rural areas and be able to design durable solutions, the new drivers that set the conditions for rural communities today also need to be considered. The flows of goods, people, and information are increasingly integrated with globalised networks [19] and today this forms an essential condition for rural communities and makes any rural landscape increasingly linked with other rural landscapes [20,21]. Farmers, foresters and other primary landscape managers are more and more dependent on external conditions outside their influence. They are linked to global processes in vertical networks both as consumers and as producers. Adding to this, there is a clear change in urban-rural relations, with urban people moving to the countryside along with their lifestyles and values, as well as increasing demands on the rural landscapes. Such developments challenge the social coherence of the rural landscapes and also create a growing need to make the landscape an attractive and well-functioning living place, a need which requires collaboration and place-based networking—as discussed in detail in the paper by Storie et al. on placemaking processes in rural Latvia and Estonia [14].

Aside from the actors and the way landscape practices are conditioned by market and technology, sectoral policies are framed by the landscape dynamics. Sectoral policies such as agricultural policy or conservation policy view specific actors as the key actors and contribute to complex power mechanisms in the management of rural resources. Climate changes and the whole sustainability agenda concerning natural resource management affects public policy making at all levels, and also affects the attention citizens devote to resource management, contributing to the new conditions for rural development.

Between Conflict Management and Placemaking

Collaborative landscape governance will often involve both the management of conflicts and the search for new solutions for the protection, management and enhancement of the landscape in question. Different stakeholders may have different ideas of and interests in how these two perspectives should be brought together and finding common ground. Combining conflict management and placemaking is therefore a key challenge for landscape governance.

Conflicts and competition over the use, management and appearance of the landscape are rife, and many public policy interventions in landscape management including environmental policy and spatial planning may function as forms of conflict management. In fact, traditional countryside planning as it has been practiced in many European countries until a few decades ago has been dominated by conflict management perspectives [3]. Different types of conflicts are dealt with: conflicts between private stakeholders concerning use or management of land; conflicts between lifelong residents and newcomers over customs and traditions; conflicts between private landowners and the protection of environmental resources including public goods; conflicts between regional and local interests; and conflicts between current and coming generations. Impartial and factual knowledge provided by experts will often constitute key inputs in conflict management, and zoning and designations represent typical plan solutions, with regulatory measures being the dominant policy instrument.

Conflicts over the future use of land are evident in the papers of Busscher et al. [8] and Nuss-Girona et al. [22], where the conflicts appear between stakeholders with different interests and at different political-administrative levels. In the case of Argentina [8], conflicts are not only between the local communities and those who buy the land, but also, and perhaps more visibly,

between the NGOs, who aim to protect the rights of the local communities though with limited countervailing power, and the provincial government which frames the conditions for the land to be bought by outsiders. The work of the NGOs has thought about a better-informed civil society, empowered local communities and improved land tenure security—but it has not solved the questions of conflict. The example of activism in Girona (Catalonia), in response to environmental conflicts, is a clear example of how different organisations and movements may be mobilised and become capable of pressuring for changes in the conservation of landscapes [22]. The paper of Khoroshev [12] demonstrates how landscape ecological mapping can contribute to the identification of environmental conflicts and needs for change. In a broader way, Angelstam et al. [13] illustrate how exploring ecological and cultural values in combination with threats and stakeholders' views may point towards more integrated and sustainable development in a remote forest region. The cases from rural Estonia and Latvia described by Storie et al. pinpoint a lack of trust between groups that can be considered as a barrier in the landscape governance process and not a spatially determined competition [14].

Future developments of the landscape as a living and visiting place for humans and wildlife represent a typical placemaking perspective. The focus here is not about balancing interests and resolving dilemmas—it is about the co-creation of solutions to new developments, from habitat restoration and cultural heritage management to the creation of recreational networks and other public services. Placemaking processes will often rely on combinations of external expertise on the one hand, and local knowledge and values on the other. Solutions will often have the form of specific projects with or without a budget.

The cases included in this Special Issue illustrate how new developments and other interventions are executed with the involvement of both public and private stakeholders [8,13,15]. The place-shaping approach in the contribution of Storie et al. tackles the immaterial aspects of placemaking. It focuses more on improving the general well-being and quality of life of the community in rural villages by stimulating social interactions between the inhabitants and the instrumental role of leadership in this process [14]. From the different contributions in this Special Issue, it is clear that common aspirations and shared interest (instead of individual or sectorial motivations) are essential conditions for a successful project and to move forward with governance models in rural landscapes.

In some of the papers, conflict management and placemaking perspectives are linked in interesting ways. As already implied in the title of the paper from Estonia and Latvia [14]—'the peace and quietness of the rural landscape is not enough' (to ensure a sustainable future), social networks must be established and conflicts between maintaining local traditions and connecting to modern lifestyles must be dealt with. This paper also clearly demonstrates the need for leadership in landscape governance.

Two other papers show in different ways how conflict management and place making perspectives intersect both in space and time. Thus, the Danish case [15] started as a local landscape strategy-making process that was almost exclusively focused on improving the attractiveness of two villages as living and visiting places. However, the process ended up with a strategy for a much larger landscape with a combined perspective of managing conflicts between raw material extraction and landscape conservation on the one side and improving conditions for biodiversity conservation and outdoor recreation on the other. This case also demonstrated the significance of scale when conflicts and new developments are to be linked. The Girona case [22] can be read as a fascinating tale of early mass tourism developments in the Costa Brava region, which in the beginning (the 1960s and 1970s) occurred without any environmental concerns; a gigantic placemaking venture operated by speculators and developers ending in profound conflicts with environmental groups. This process was then (for a short period) replaced by another placemaking process, resulting in new designated national parks after which yet another tourist bonanza period started, without the necessary complementary management of conflicts in place. All in all, there were three periods of development, each one resulting in conflicts. In the words of the authors [22]: "Throughout these three cycles of growth and crisis, environmental activism deeply rooted and spread in Girona's society. Awareness about the quality and value of landscape became part of a social milieu, ready to react when transformations were done

at an accelerated pace or affected spaces that, in a new context of values, made sense from the point of view of local identity or sustainability” [21] (p. 15).

Indeed, landscape governance needs to involve both conflict and placemaking dimensions and to do so, collaborative processes are crucial. From a professional point of view, this combination of perspectives is difficult because different disciplines traditionally use different paradigms for what is the right knowledge and appropriate procedure, for example.

Conclusions

Returning to the questions framing this Special Issue, we can note that rural landscape governance is diverse. No unique approach to bringing the different stakeholders together exists—it will depend on the conflicts and developments that need to be dealt with, and on the overall context where the landscape is included. It is also clear from the presented papers that examples of processes operating on firm ground in terms of former experience are few. Innovative approaches to management of conflicts and new developments are provided by the papers, but uncertainties and the search for new and not yet validated ways to deal with protection, management and enhancement of landscapes are also found in the set of papers in this Special Issue. To bring rural landscape governance forward, we see three pathways.

First, different disciplines need to work closer together and integrate their ways of functioning, experimenting approaches that may lead to new and replicable solutions.

Second, more experimental projects are needed, not only in respect to processes but also in relation to policy and planning solutions brought in or coming out of landscape governance. For a wider coverage, these experimental projects would need to take place in many different contexts, from a socio-economic, cultural, and biophysical point of view. In the urban governance, there is a rich tradition of experimentation concerning processes of strategy making and co-design, a tradition which also includes widespread professional discourses of specific examples. It is striking that this is much rarer in rural contexts. An obvious way to promote such experiments is to support new cross sectoral and cross disciplinary institutions at different levels.

Third, more research is needed to get more knowledge of how rural landscape governance functions in practice and with what outcomes, which are both equally important and are aimed towards supporting governance practices.

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