

Landscape Stewardship: Integrating landscape values into rural development policies

Landscape stewardship is centered on everyday, often rural and peri-urban, landscapes that are exposed to multiple societal demands. These include infrastructure purposes, urbanization, agricultural-land uses, or outdoor recreation. Here, decision making involves many stakeholders, ranging from farmers through local residents to tourists and nature conservationists.



The second EU level workshop of the HERCULES project gathered participants to (1) explore the characteristics of landscape stewardship initiatives in Europe and their contributions to sustainable land management, (2) discuss the role of landscape stewardship in EU rural development policies, and (3) examine how Europe could contribute towards making innovative models of landscape stewardship more effective.

Tobias PLIENINGER, coordinator of HERCULES, gave us his thoughts on what he takes home from the workshop.



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Landscape in EU policies

Landscape is a late-comer among the research themes of the 7th Framework Programme of the EU. This is somehow indicative for the EU and many national policies where landscape has remained unconsidered for a long time. Fortunately, there are signs of change. For example, practical approaches to cultural heritage conservation and to ecosystem management are step-by-step moving to the landscape scale. Landscapes are also a serious concern for large parts of the public, as many prominent land-use conflicts, for example around mining or renewable energies show. Landscape is also increasingly seen as an investment opportunity and may receive higher EU funding priority in the near future.

The rise of landscape stewardship

A multitude of examples from throughout Europe demonstrate that there is something like landscape stewardship in practice. Such approaches comprise many different types of groups and initiatives, often united by an interest in maintaining and developing the cultural ecosystem services of a particular landscape. These initiatives frequently cross borders between

fields such as nature conservation, agriculture, or cultural heritage. As a result, they have difficulties in linking to established policy fields, but there are examples in the Netherlands and elsewhere where such initiatives were assigned formal responsibility in land management.

Framings, values, and management actions of landscape stewards

Who are landscape stewards as individuals? A survey among land managers in the UK showed that there are many different frames and perceptions of landscape stewardship, with some focusing more on environmental, others on production orientations. These different points of departure are accompanied by different values and management practices.

Fostering innovative models of landscape stewardship

Although motivation of land managers is crucial for achieving agro-environmental goals, existing incentive schemes have often not considered this diversity of different framings and values very well. Rural development policies could foster landscape stewardship through tailoring

of policy targets to specific land-use systems, landscape attributes or catchments. A big challenge for the future design and implementation of rural development policies will be to realign such features with the need for administrative simplification of funding schemes. To mainstream landscape stewardship in land management practice, we may have to go wider than just reinventing funding schemes. Also, we do not know well enough how for example farmers perform in terms of landscape stewardship. This calls for better social-ecological indicators that would be used for cross-farm comparisons and that might even become part of accounting systems. Finally, the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy has large potential to become a vehicle for promoting landscape stewardship.

The workshop was a as a side event to the Green Week and was hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee.

For more information on the HERCULES project visit www.hercules-landscapes.eu



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