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Landcare in Germany

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5.1 Introduction

Beginning in the 1980s in several parts of Germany, a grassroots movement started building local networks to foster connection between and among rural areas. These regional non-governmental networks link nature conversation groups with local farmers and politicians.

It was in that time that various land consolidation schemes prompted the conversion of once, privately owned “biotope-land” to be managed by public hands in several areas of Western-Germany. Within this new management context, local communities sought expert advice to better manage these habitats, which includes hedges, poor soil pastures, wetland-meadows, etc. In Germany, there were two seemingly opposing groups - environmentalists on the one side and farmers on the other - with different ideas on how to manage the land. However, local political leaders and representatives of local nature conservation agencies brought these two groups together. The first regional Landcare Association (LCA) was founded in Bavaria in 1986 to enhance co-operation between these opposing interest groups. Today, activists, farmers and local administrations are working together to implement integrated and sustainable land management practices in many rural areas of Germany.

This approach, which was then referred as Landcare was found successful, because each group had an equal voice--No group was stronger than the other. Since then, the Landcare approach or concept spread quickly in some parts of Germany. Without a systematic approach to scaling-up the Landcare approach, a good idea appeared to be copied very quickly! Subsequently, the reunification of Germany in 1989/90 provided the opportunity to promote the LCA concept to partners in the new eastern Federal States. Financial support from the Federal Ministry for the Environment was sought, to initiate a project to spread the Landcare concept more actively. Conservation groups, farmers and local politicians initiated the formation of local LCAs, and by 2006, 141 regional LCAs have been formed across Germany. With funding support from local and national governments, some local LCAs lobbied for, and initiated efforts to create the German Association for Landcare (Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege e.V., or DVL), and in 1993, the DVL was created as an umbrella association, representing all LCAs at the national level.

Interestingly, Landcare in Germany started at about the same time, as it started in Australia in 1986. Nobody had actually brought-in the idea of Landcare to Germany-- it happened by coincidence, but later, the expression, “Landcare” was adopted from Australia - it gives the right impression – caring for the land we manage. This idea came from pioneer leaders of the three founding groups (farmers, conservationists, politicians), notably Mr. Josef Goepfel who is still the current Chair of the DVL Board.

5.2 Landcare Associations in Germany – Bridging the gap between Man and Nature

Europe has been cultivated for centuries. This has led to diverse landscapes in the countryside with mountain-meadows, poor-soil pastures, hedgerows and orchards. Unless continually managed by

farmers, these areas will be left under fallow, or revert to forests. The endangered flora and fauna that have adapted to these extensive farmland habitats will disappear, and the regions would lose their attraction both to investors and tourists. It was believed that maintaining these diverse cultivated landscapes can still meet the desired conservation goals, and benefits rural communities and tourism. This is where most Landcare Associations (LCA's) are currently focused. The LCA's, bridge the gap between and among diverse land use interests, bringing regional stakeholders together to coordinate their various interests. For instance, farmers want to earn money from their hard work, the tourism industry wants to sell a magnificent landscape, while conservationists are concerned about the security of plant and animal habitats. Subsequently, Landcare groups supported the idea of linking farmers' interests with aspects of sustainable land use and biodiversity.



5.2.1 Landcare Aims

In general, Landcare-Germany aims to:

1. Create a network of natural habitats in order to protect the native fauna and flora as well as the biological resources in all of Germany's cultivated landscapes.
2. Support environment friendly land use systems and regional economic development.
3. Help farmers earn additional income from conservation and landscape management and market their regional products.
4. Raise awareness of the importance of appropriate land management through the landcare approach, involving the formal education system (even Kindergartens) to ensure that Landcare is mainstreamed in current and future education curriculum and programs.

5.2.2 How does Landcare work?

In the mid-eighties, land consolidation schemes in Germany have led to the transfer of once privately owned biotopes into public hands hence, Landcare activities initially focused on public lands. Landcare projects are thus, mainly site or habitat based, involving several farmers or communities, rather than farm based. But LCAs are also encouraging and supporting individual farmers to take

advantage of applicable agri-environment schemes, imposed by the European Union (EU) on private farms.

On the basis of existing concepts developed by conservation experts (e.g. federal conservation-plans, concepts for model-projects or community “landscape-plans”), Landcare coordinators at the regional LCA map the local site, describe the actual measures to be taken, calculate the costs, develop project proposals and apply for subsidies from the regional government through the various agri-environmental schemes. These schemes vary between states, but many are co-financed by the European Union (EU). In addition, Landcare coordinators organize and supervise the implementation of activities with local farmers, and monitor project outcomes. In all these processes, coordinators closely work with local communities, conservation groups, and government authorities such as conservation, agriculture, forestry and water management authorities. But farmers are the main “actors” in the implementation phase because they are more familiar with their local landscape.

In Germany, the community has great influence on land management issues. Hence, LCAs work with local communities, involving the local mayor and the municipal council. They are crucial stakeholders in initiating Landcare projects on public lands, such as those focused on improving grazing on conservation sites and watercourse-restoration. In some cases, the local community acquires adjacent lands from farmers and landowners to improve the watercourse in a Landcare project. Furthermore, the community plays an important role as a member of the local LCA, as it helps finance LCA activities. Up to 70% of project-money comes from the Federal State if the project is on public land, and the community or landowners (on private land) share the remaining costs.



New strategies

Initially, Landcare projects evolved from just planting trees or hedges and grass cutting, to maintaining diverse cultivated landscapes. Later, a new strategy was developed to promote sustainable management of extensive land-use systems, by helping farmers market their quality products, such as apple juice and lamb-meat. These products, which are typical commodities from different regions, are produced under environment-friendly production systems. Farmers are also being helped to “create”

and market new “nature-conservation-products”, like lamb-meat from dry limestone pastures as a regional speciality. The LCA’s efforts to promote the marketing of lamb in local restaurants have encouraged farmers’ participation, showing that sheep grazing on poor-soil pastures can be economically profitable while still being unproductive¹. Product expansion, like apple juice from orchards has shown a great potential in the establishment of regional economies. This has helped farmers, restaurant owners, local butchers, and the local economy as a whole—increasing cash-flow within the local market.

5.2.3. Funding the LCAs

In Germany, the conservation of landscapes is the responsibility of the 16 Federal States. The Departments of Agriculture or Environment within the Federal Government supports model conservation projects that cover larger areas. In this case, they incur most of the financial cost, but when the project involves developing tourism, the Department of Trade and Commerce can usually provide project funding.

The 16 Federal States have different policies and natural resource management strategies, hence, funding support to LCAs vary significantly between states. However, although not an explicit state policy, many Federal States are funding the administrative cost of LCA’s and Landcare projects. In addition, (as indicated earlier) many Landcare projects are funded through diverse agri-environmental schemes funded by the EU. Besides different financing models or subsidies received or applied by LCA’s, they also collect membership fees, donations, and penalties from environmental offences and employs “eco-sponsoring” (private sector sponsors environment friendly initiatives). Finally, LCA’s are charities--everyone, including associations, organizations, authorities and individual persons or business firms can become members of the LCA. Membership fees range from 5-25 € for individuals, 10-250 € for firms and organizations and 0.05-1 € per citizen per year for cities and towns.

5.2.4 Key Principles of Landcare- Germany

Parity

Each participating interest group namely, conservationists, farmers, and local politicians is equally represented in the board of LCAs, which are elected by its members. This balanced structure enhances trust amongst the different participating groups and is responsible for the success of LCA’s.

Voluntary participation

LCAs rely on the principle of voluntary participation, where it is found crucial for long-term success and sustainability. LCAs act upon the request of landowners such as local communities, private persons or organisations. Its strength lies, where official competence and regulation find their limit.

Regional connection

No landscape looks the same-- each habitat requires a different management approach. Hence, LCAs considers regional differences and focuses on the preservation of specific landscapes. Instead of uniformity, the LCAs promote regional diversity, which forms the basis for long-term attractiveness for recreation and tourism. LCA’s working area usually covers one district or one natural region, for example the Thuringian Forest, an upland region of about 3.000 square-km. .

Membership

Membership includes local communities, farmers, landowners, conservationists – everyone who is interested in maintaining a healthy landscape and rich biodiversity.

¹ In Germany, farmers are paid via agri-environmental schemes for keeping up unproductive farming-methods that are important for “biotope-land“.

Legal status

The LCAs are independent and registered as non-profit organizations serving the public interest.

Advisory panel

An advisory panel of experts is attached to each regional LCA and provides the board with expert advice. The local LCA decides on the panel of experts and ensures the multi-disciplinarity of the panel.

Staff

The number of staff working in LCAs depends on the size of the respective working-area but averages to 2 Landcare coordinators per district. These coordinators are usually professionals with specific disciplinary expertise such as biologists, farmers, foresters, geographers, resource management. Their main tasks are to coordinate Landcare projects on public lands, farmlands, and privately owned non-farmlands.

Funding

LCA activities are supported to varying degrees by local communities and regional governments. Additional revenues are also generated from membership fees. Generally, the LCA pays its own staff, but in some Federal States, the staff is partly paid by regional governments. Funding for specific projects is being sought from various sources, such as the EU agri-environment schemes.

5.3.2 DVL--the national umbrella organization for Landcare

As mentioned earlier, the German Association for Landcare or DVL was formed as an umbrella organization, representing all LCA's at the national level-- the Federal Government and 16 State Governments. The DVL became a hub for technical and market information, and supports the formation of new LCA's. Only LCAs can become member of DVL, but they decide on their membership, as they are legally autonomous associations. However, majority of LCAs (95%) are members of the DVL. The DVL-membership fees are minimal, and do not substantially support its operational costs. The DVL Board adopts the principles of parity where various interest groups are represented, including conservationists, farmers and communities.

In cooperation with local LCA's, the DVL carries out model Landcare projects. Examples of these projects are for example aiming at the transfer of best practice knowledge on planting hedges, construction of dry stone dykes, and other landscape features or the establishment of long-distance biotope networks. It is also serving as Consultant to the Federal Government and State Departments on matters pertaining to natural resource management. The DVL has to deal with 16 different legislations of the 16 "Laender" (Federal States) in Germany, of which, the layers of bureaucracy are great and highly variable between states. This makes it challenging for DVL, particularly in securing and increasing funding for nature conservation and contracting agri-environment schemes.

The DVL also supports regional marketing strategies. There exist about 1000 marketing groups that received various degrees of facilitation from DVL, but are still insufficiently linked with each other. An internet based platform, called REGINET was established by DVL and other partners to improve networking between and amongst marketing and producer groups--the website (www.reginet.de) is open to all regional projects in Germany, and by the end of 2005, about 450 initiatives were listed in the REGINET.

5.4 Political Engagement

German farmers depend on the political framework that the European Union (EU) has determined in its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In 2001, expenditure under the CAP averaged 333 Euro per hectare of agricultural land in the EU, which for example on average, made up about 50% of a Bavarian farmer's income.

EU subsidies also contribute to the Bavarian Landcare Programme – a typical scheme LCAs deal with. Fifty per cent (50%) of the money that supports Landcare projects comes from EU subsidies. Experience shows that it has become easier for communities and farmers in LCAs to get onto a scheme when they get expert advice from the local LCA. However, the CAP favours intensive agricultural regions--a large proportion of CAP subsidies are directed to the largest and most productive farms--- not to agri-environmental measures. There are opposing views on the CAP-- public opinion doesn't favour subsidies for large, productive farms, as they are seen to contribute to many of the more serious environmental problems, such as poor air and water quality or loss of biodiversity. For this reason, German Landcare supports the proposal to reform the CAP in order to decouple the subsidies from pure agricultural production, and link them to environmental and sustainable rural development objectives. Since 2005, advocacy works were vigorously pursued and some subsidies have been decoupled, now linking them to the environmental objectives of the EU.

5.5 International Cooperation

International exchange of ideas and views can bring more progress to German Landcare. The LCAs could learn a lot from other Landcare initiatives around the world. Within the EU community, contacts were maintained with similar organisations, including the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) in the UK, which has a lot of experience in the practical process of giving whole-farm advice to farmers--something that is feasible in Germany.

The Natura 2000 Network is an ecological network for natural areas designated to conserve Europe's rich but vulnerable habitats and species. The network includes over 20.000 sites from all 25 Member States of the EU. Collectively they cover a substantial area: almost a fifth of Europe's land and water. In many parts of Germany, Landcare Associations are involved in Natura 2000 sites – in some cases they do this in cross-border projects with Poland, the Tschech Republik or Belgium and Luxembourg.

Furthermore, the DVL and local LCAs are engaged in knowledge-sharing of livestock management in different habitats, and aims to promote this as a cost-efficient option to nature conservation agencies in Germany. Correspondingly, DVL can also share management experiences of several other Natura 2000-habitats or –species like beaver, pearl-mussels, wetland birds etc. The Biodiversity Action Plan used in the UK, which highlights management options of key species and habitats found on a farm, is seen to be also applicable in Germany.

An agreement signed by different organisations at a DVL conference in June 2004 illustrates the willingness to share best practices and ideas between countries. Knowledge-sharing and network-building is envisaged to build Landcare in the European landscape.

5.6 Lessons Learned

1. The German Association for Landcare or DVL provided a greater voice and power in representing LCAs at the national level. National level structure is important in initiating larger-scale efforts. Without such organized entity at the national level, the efforts of LCAs would not have been easily observed by the State and Federal governments.

2. Local leadership, staff competence and effective governance structures of LCAs and the DVL are non-negotiable factors to success.

3. Parity, voluntary participation and regional connection are key characteristics of the LCA-concept and have proven success. Maintaining these characteristics however, requires continued investment in training and capacity-building of Landcare actors.

4. Generating public-government support for Landcare is a demanding task, since the 16 Federal States have different policies and natural resource management strategies. However, regardless of their differences, the governments assimilated the Landcare concept, and with highly-perceived benefits, supported LCA projects and activities.

5. Political engagement is also important, although it can be tricky and can lead to co-option. This requires strong personalities and principle-centred leadership. Both sides benefit from political engagement – it can contribute significantly to bringing the folds of government closer to the people.

5.7 Concluding Comments

During the last twenty years, Landcare in Germany has developed into a powerful force that catalyzes positive change in the way agricultural landscapes and conservation areas are currently managed, particularly in less favoured areas. Although, this process did not go without problems and challenges, the main source of strength, where Landcare has drawn its success is from the commitment and cooperation of the farming communities that share a common purpose—more than 20.000 farmers all over Germany are now working together within their LCA structures to maintain the natural beauty and ecological capital of their regions. This represents a strong “social capital” where effective government mechanisms (e.g. payments for environmental services), other than the EU agri-environment schemes can be properly channelled to deserving communities and individuals. Varying degrees of support from governments at different levels have been favourable, contributing to success—without which, Landcare could not have reached to a level that could bring significant impacts to a scale that really matters.