



LandscapePartners

– Report –

The Use of Indicators in Annual Reporting by German Landschaftspflegeverbände (LPV)

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1 Introduction

This report represents part of the research carried out in the Landscape Partners Project (www.macaulay.ac.uk/LandscapePartners) which aims to identify, analyse and assess the contribution of multi-stakeholder partnerships to the sustainable management of rural landscapes and to the well-being of communities. For the German case study, the investigation focussed on *Landschaftspflegeverbände* (LPV), *Landschaftserhaltungsverbände*, *Biologische Stationen* and similar groups that are acknowledged by the German Association for Landcare (*Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege*, DVL). They are agri-environmental collaborative groups which were selected because they represent a mix of stakeholders, including farmers, citizens, municipalities and nature conservation interests.

This report presents the findings of a document analysis carried out by Jula Heide during her working visit at the James Hutton Institute in January and February 2012. It complements a similar report produced by Elisa de Lijster and Katrin Prager for the Dutch Agrarische Natuurverenigingen (May 2012) and an online survey (July – October 2011). The aim of the document analysis was to assess

- to what extent LPV use indicators to monitor and record the progress they make,
- which indicators they use, and
- to what extent these indicators are documented and published, e.g. in annual reports.

The expectation was that this analysis would enhance our understanding about the extent to which the contribution of LPV can be evaluated based on available material produced by the groups.

2 Methods: Database for the document analysis

We analysed a total of 34 documents from 21 *Landschaftspflegeverbände* (LPV, Annex A). In some cases several reports were available from the same group. The sample of documents contained a total of 22 annual reports or similar reports. The database for the document analysis included different types of reports and other documents (Annex B) that contain information on the activities that groups undertake (duration, contents, audiences), including:

- 14 annual reports (*Jahresbericht*)
- 2 activity reports (*Tätigkeitsbericht*)
- 5 executive reports/ business reports (*Geschäftsbericht*)
- 1 (statement of) accounts (*Rechenschaftsbericht*)
- 3 committee reports (*Vorstandsbericht*)
- 2 press releases (*Pressemitteilungen*)



- 7 other: newsletters/ catalogue of measures (*Infobrief, Mitgliederrundbrief, Massnahmenkatalog*)

They tend to cover a similar number of activities that occurred throughout a certain period (usually one year) and provide information relevant to the group. Newsletters are an exception as they are published twice a year.

These reports and documents generally do not have a specific audience, with the exception of committee reports and press releases.

Annual reports, executive reports, activity reports and accounts are similar in many respects and thus can be grouped as one type of document (total of 22 reports analysed). They have an average of 20 pages, report on a similar number and range of activities, have no personal from of address, and rarely acknowledgements for members or funders. We observed that groups based the same state tend to use the same term (title) for their report (with the exception of Bavaria). The layout of this type of documents is usually professionally designed.

The next type of document includes committee reports and press releases. Their layout is mostly average or below, which is due to the fact that they have a different purpose. Committee reports are intended to be presented as (Powerpoint) presentations or present a report via this tool (press release). They finish with acknowledgements. The press release contains a personal address (the public, members and sponsors). Table of contents are not included as they are not typical the purpose of the document.

The last type is a hybrid between type 1 and type 2 documents. They cover the newsletters and information letters (for members). They are composed in a more personal way than annual reports etc (type 1) because they may start with a 'cover letter' or end with acknowledgements like type 2. The information letter also had a table of contents. They are much shorter – they are meant as 'letters' – which distinguishes them from type 1.

3 Analysis of annual and business reports

3.1 Availability of annual reports

Every *Landschaftspflegeverband* (LPV) tends to prepare and present the documentation of their activities differently. We assumed that annual reports would be accessible via the group's website. However, a large number of groups (particularly in Bavaria) do not have a website at all. Some



websites document aims and activities in a lot of detail and provide different kinds of material and documents for download. Other pages were less clear and provided little information, or were seriously outdated.

Of the 140 LPV in Germany approximately 20 groups (~15%) make their annual reports, articles in the local press, and newsletters available on their website. 44 groups responded to the online questionnaire (~30%). Among those groups that provide their reports, most provide reports of several years. 9 out of the 16 states have at least one group that publishes their annual reports. Bavaria has most groups, of which 7 publish an annual report. Baden-Württemberg (BW) and Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) respectively have 4 groups that published annual reports. It was noteworthy that the Biological Stations (the type of LPV in NRW) compile at least 20 page reports, and often more.

We were surprised to find that 3 groups in the online survey stated that they publish their annual reports on their website but we were not able to find these reports. In other cases respondents had said they would not publish reports but we found some reports online. A possible explanation is that the person responding to the survey was not aware of the recent state of the website, or that they knew of recent reports that were planned to be uploaded but that had not happened yet.

The overall impression from the analysis of the reports is that there is no common guideline as to what should be recorded and documented and what form the report should have. NRW might be an exception because the Biological Stations' reporting showed similarities. These very different formats cause difficulties when trying to make comparisons or recognise trends.

3.2 Period and topics covered

Reports usually covered a 12 months period and corresponded to either the calendar year or the financial year. A common reason for this is the alignment of group reporting periods with EU requirements when accounting for funding. Exceptions were LPV Sternberger Endmoränengebiet (3 years) and Arbeitsgemeinschaft Schwäbisches Donaumoos (20 years).

The report length ranged from 2 pages to 100 pages, with an average of 15-10 pages. There is a tendency that the longer a report the more activities are described or the more detail on activities is included. Common topics covered are: landscape maintenance, projects and public relations. In particular the section on public relations (includes awareness raising) was similar in many reports (cooperations, events and festivals, excursions and workshops, press coverage). The public relation



activities tend to be well documented and partially evaluated with indicators (e.g. number of visitors, see section on indicators).

With regard to landscape management there are common themes: some activities (mowing meadows, trimming/coppicing hedges/trees, recording monitoring of selected species¹, concept and project planning) are common among groups. The focus across the groups appears to be on vegetation management with the aim to maintain or increase the biodiversity in vegetation/habitats. This can ultimately be expected to also benefit wildlife. In cases where wildlife was the primary focus it was often as one-off measures or projects or recording (e.g. beaver, bat).

3.3 Reporting of indicators

There is no obvious relation between the number of pages and the reporting of quantitative indicators. On the one hand, there are very long reports that do not include much quantitative data. On the other hand, there are groups that document their work by presenting a lot of detailed data in a short report. The following quantitative indicators are commonly documented: number of saplings planted, length or number of hedges planted, or area covered (km², m²). A possible explanation is the subsidies that groups receive from the municipality or the land owner per tree planted or habitat maintained, i.e. it is required for the reporting on the contract.

In cases where species were recorded or monitored, groups presented quantitative data on numbers found of each species, or descriptive indicators (e.g. 'several animals were sighted, i.e. species is not extinct'). The majority of reports simply state that species were recorded without giving any numbers.

In the area of public relations groups often stated how many people attended an event (e.g. school classes or pre-school groups). For the production of local apple juice the unit of measurement was in litres or weight (tons of pressed apples).

Although there are numerous groups that do not document any quantitative indicators in their reports, most reports contained qualitative indicators which suggests that groups do 'somehow' check on their progress and that members and external stakeholders are interested in achievements. We assume that members are content as long as activities were implemented in the course of a year and the annual report reminds members of these events. The contents of reports (if they are seen as reflecting what members want to see and be told about) suggest that in general,

¹ Mahd und Gehölzpflege/ Entbuschung wurden von nahezu allen untersuchten Verbänden durchgeführt; Kartierung/ Monitoring von unterschiedlicher Qualität und Quantität



members have less of a demand for facts, numbers and detailed impact analysis. Potentially they are aware of the long-term direction of the group so that they are satisfied as long as the activities (that members agreed to or find useful) contribute to the broader goals of the group. The collection of data takes additional time and resources which may not be considered as a wise use of time.

3.4 Relationship between group size, staff, and use of indicators in reports

The classification of groups in our sample according to their membership (small, medium, large groups) is included in Annex C. The information about members came from the questionnaire (9 out of 15 groups), the annual reports (4 groups) or from both sources (2 groups, with diverging numbers given). We speculate that only those groups with relatively large membership publish these numbers in their report. At the same time, there are also many groups with a large membership that do not publish these figures.

There is no relationship between the number of members a group has and the length of reports they prepare. There are both, small groups that produce very short and very long reports, as well as groups with average or larger membership.

We were not able to detect a relationship between the number of members and the quality of a report. We (subjectively) judged the quality on the use of quantitative or qualitative indicators and the general appearance and layout of the report. Across all group sizes (small, average and large membership) there were groups that produced detailed reports, and there were groups that used neither type of indicator, only one type of indicator, or both types of indicators.

There is also no relationship between paid (full-time or part-time) staff and the use of indicators in group reports. Some of the groups that have few staff use quantitative indicators, or none at all, while groups that employ many staff may use both types of indicators commonly (1 group), only one type (2 groups rather qualitative, 1 group rather quantitative), or non at all (1 group). 4 of the 6 reports produced by groups with few staff were of poor quality (judgement based on an insufficient description of implemented management activities). Another group with only 1 staff, in contrast, produced a report of very high quality. Surprisingly, most reports of groups that have many staff are only of average quality (i.e. poor use of indicators) although they sometimes describe management activities well. There is a tendency that reports prepared by groups with many staff are longer (however, exceptions are possible).



3.5 Membership and funding

We were surprised to rarely find figures on group size, membership background, and financial situation in the reports. In those cases where the number of members was stated, the membership composition was usually specified (e.g. citizens, NGO, municipality, enterprise). It was very rare that reports included project costs or personnel costs. Similarly, sources of funding and amount of funding generated were rarely specified. An exception is EU projects which were usually explicitly listed as such. We assume that the detailed accounting (income, spending) is typically included in project reports or internal communication with the funding body. Hence the authors of annual reports may feel these details are not of interest to the wider membership or even confidential. We also observed that where funding figures are high or the group appears to be well-off the numbers or more likely to appear in the annual report.

The involvement of volunteers can be seen as an indicator for how well the group is connected to the wider community and manages to engage non-members. There is an issue with the interpretation of volunteers or unpaid persons (in German: *Freiwillige, Ehrenamtlich-Tätige*). Depending on the definition of ‘working with volunteers’, e.g. regular or ad-hoc contribution or involvement in group activities, different figures can be found in the online survey and in reports. For example, Biological Station Haus Bürgel (NRW) said in the survey they have 15 ‘engaged volunteers’, while in their report they list ‘between 100 and 250 volunteers helping with the harvest’.

3.6 Use of photographs and charts

We were interested to see to what extent photographs and charts were used in reports and what purpose they might be used for. Only 5 of the 30 (15%) analysed documents (reports, newsletters etc.) do not include any form of illustration (photos, maps, charts, tables). Photos are the most common illustration, followed by tables and maps. In particular pie charts are used to visualise numbers and increase the ‘professional look’ of a report. In some cases maps were included that were not legible, so the main reason for including them appears to relate to appearance rather than contents (or a lack of ability of the author). If the quality of the maps is sufficient they allow the reader to spatially locate information presented in the text.

Photos often show a gathering of all group members or individual people, such as staff members. This gives the report a familiar touch if the readers are members of the group. Other common objects in photos are the animals and plants that the group works to protect, or scenic landscapes. This helps to show the beauty or existence of these natural elements that are worth protecting.



Another common type of photos documents the difficult terrain where landscape management activities are carried out (steep slopes) and the results of the work (a valley where conifers were removed). However, ‘before’ and ‘after’ photographs are rare. Events are also commonly documented with photos to capture the atmosphere or show how much fun the visitors have. Press articles that cover such events are often included in the annex to reports.

4 Summary

This report set out to assess to what extent *Landschaftspflegeverbände* (LPV) use indicators to monitor and record the progress they make, which indicators they use, and to what extent these indicators are documented and published by LPV. We assumed that annual reports are a widely used tool among groups to record indicators for progress and to feedback to members and funding organisations. We were able to access a total of 22 reports partially online and partially from groups directly. The analysis of these reports was complemented with other material including newsletters and websites.

Since only approximately 20 groups (~15%) of the 140 LPV in Germany make their annual reports and newsletters available on their website, this source alone cannot be considered adequate to evaluate the contribution of LPV to sustainable landscape management. More reports could probably be accessed if groups were contacted individually and paper copies made available. In addition to the small overall number of reports available, other factors reduce the comparability of reports and the data they contain, e.g. reports cover different reporting periods or date from different years. Furthermore, the reports differ greatly in length, the amount of detail they provide, the extent to which indicators are used, and the type of indicators used (qualitative or quantitative indicators).

We assume that groups may undertake monitoring activities without explicitly mentioning them in their annual reports. Much data on indicators may also be contained in various project reports, in which case the level of detail would be determined by the funder. We derive from the analysis that annual reports are compiled to satisfy the requirements of group members rather than the requirement of sponsors and funding organisation. Hence, reports serve to inform LPV members of progress (e.g. projects completed) and keeping up to date (a function served by newsletters). We also note that the compilation of data for an annual report, the writing up and layout is a resource-intensive process which some groups may not be able or willing to invest.



5 Annexes

5.1 Annex A – Groups whose documents were analysed

Group name	Type of document*	Number of documents
Landschaftserhaltungsverband Emmendingen; Baden-Württemberg	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Sternberger Endmoränengebiet; Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Thüringer Wald; Thüringen	Report	1
Biologische Station im Ennepe Ruhr Kreis; Nordrhein-Westfalen	Report	1
Biologische Station Haus Bürgel; Nordrhein-Westfalen	Report	2
Biologische Station Düren, Nordrhein-Westfalen	Report	2
Biologische Station Mittlere Wupper/ Biologische Station Soest; Nordrhein-Westfalen	Report	1
Landschaftserhaltungsverband für den Landkreis Heilbronn; Baden-Württemberg	Report	1
Landschaftserhaltungsverband Schwäbisch Hall; Baden-Württemberg	Report	1
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Schwäbisches Donaumoos e.V., Bayern	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Kelheim VöF e.V., Bayern	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Landkreis Lichtenfels; Bayern	Report	2
Landschaftspflegeverband Mittelfranken, Bayern	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Regensburg e. V., Bayern	Report	2
Landschaftspflegeverband Rottal-Inn; Bayern	Report	2
Naturschutzring Aukrug e. V., Schleswig-Holstein	Report	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Rheingau-Taunus, Hessen	Report	1
Naturschutzring Aukrug e. V, Schleswig-Holstein	Massnahmenkatalog	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Uckermark-Schorfheide; Brandenburg	Vorstandsbericht	1
Landschaftspflegeverband Mittleres Erzgebirge, Sachsen	Vorstandsbericht	2
Landschaftspflegeverband Neumarkt i.d.OPf. e.V.; Bayern	Pressemitteilung	2
Landschaftspflegeverband Mittlerer Schwarzwald, Baden-Württemberg	Infobrief	4
Landschaftspflegeverband Mittleres Erzgebirge, Sachsen	Mitgliederrundbrief	2
Total documents		34

* The category „Report“ includes *Jahresberichte, Geschäftsberichte, Tätigkeitsberichte, Rechenschaftsberichte*



5.2 Annex B – Type of document per state

Type of report	Federal state (<i>Bundesland</i>)
Jahresberichte	Nordrhein-Westfalen (5x), Bayern (8x), Schleswig-Holstein (1x)
Geschäftsberichte	Baden-Württemberg (3x), Thüringen (1x), Bayern (1x)
Tätigkeitsberichte	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (1x), Nordrhein-Westfalen (1x)
Rechenschaftsbericht	Hessen (1x)
Massnahmenkatalog	Schleswig-Holstein (1x)
Vorstandsbericht	Berlin-Brandenburg (1x), Sachsen (2x)
Pressemitteilung	Bayern (2x)
Mitgliederrundbrief	Sachsen (2x)
Infobriefe	Baden-Württemberg (1x)

5.3 Annex C – Group classification according to membership size

This is a list of groups whose reports or other documents were analysed and where number of members was known.

- Small groups (1-49 members):
 - Biologische Station Düren
 - Landschaftserhaltungsverband Schwäbisch Hall
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Rottal-Inn
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Rheingau-Taunus
- Medium-sized group (50-100 members):
 - Thüringer Wald
 - Landschaftserhaltungsverband für den Landkreis Heilbronn
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Uckermark-Schorfheide
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Mittlerer Schwarzwald (Infobrief)
- Large groups (more than 100 members):
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Neumarkt (Pressemitteilung)
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Mittelfranken
 - Biologische Station Mittlere Wupper/ Biologische Station Soest
 - Naturschutzring Aukrug
 - Arbeitsgemeinschaft Schwäbisches Donaumoos (20jähriger Bericht)
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Kelheim
 - Landschaftspflegeverband Landkreis Lichtenfels