

STRATEGIES FOR THE ENGAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN LANDSCAPE GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT: *Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS) are most often considered as key actors in territorial development. However, the strategies applied by these institutions to effectively engage in landscape planning have been less studied. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of how two ENGOS are attempting to influence landscape scale governance in Luxembourg. The results disclose that because ENGOS are not often incorporated at the preliminary stages of policy planning, they retaliate by using two main methods of engagement; self-mobilisation and legal actions. These approaches have been blamed for slowing down regional projects. Nonetheless, they are argued for promoting effective participation in sustainable landscape development.*

KEYWORDS: ENGOS, Landscape Governance, Participation, Strategies, Luxembourg

INTRODUCTION

More than ever before has the problem of landscape management been very challenging, requiring the involvement of multilevel stakeholders, with diverse views (Newig et al., 2016; Luyet et al., Goodchild, 2015; 2012; Scott, 2011; Tress and Tress, 2003). This has come at a time when the deflation of state supremacy (Brenner, 2004) has attracted the attention of non-state groups such as Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOS), on issues of territorial development, thus increasing their willingness to effectively participate in processes of landscape governance (Pellis et al., 2015; Luz, 2000; Stenseke, 2009; Valencia-Sandoval et al., 2010; Fischer 2015).

For decades, studies about landscape governance have often focused on definition (Leibenath and Lintz, 2017; Buizer et al., 2016; Janssen and Knippenberg, 2012; Penker and Wyrzens, 2008; Ros-Tonen et al., 2014; Southern et al., 2011) and conceptualisation (Görg, 2007; Mitchell, 2001; Newig et al., 2014; Potschin and Haines-Young, 2006), including spatial hierarchy (Newig and Fritsch, 2008) and the role of communication and technology (Watts et al., 2012). Despite the role of these investigations, studies on the strategies applied by ENGOS to engage actively in landscape governance are lacking. This has made it difficult to assess the role played by these organisations in public-private debates about territorial development. As such, this is the objective motivating this study. That is, to answer the question; how do ENGOS attempt to influence landscape scale governance? More narrowly in the context of Luxembourg, how do ENGOS fit, if at all, within nationally defined guiding principles on landscape governance and how do they use them to influence territorial development?

This paper answers these questions based on an examination of the approaches of participation of ENGOS in landscape governance, in Luxembourg. The example of Luxembourg fits in this analysis, particularly because of the country's young history of spatial planning, coupled with a less complex regime system that consists of municipalities at the local level and other government agencies at the national level.

Study Background

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a small country, covering a surface of about 2586 km², holding a population of approximately 562 958 inhabitants (STATEC, 2015 a). Economically, it is a dynamic country, with one of Europe's highest GDP. Today, the country is accelerating in landscape transformation, as seen from improvements in transport and real estate, including rapid urban-rural encroachment. As a result, there are worries about the amount of growth this country can contain in the years ahead, including the environmental effects of current development policies. In a quest to manage some of these concerns, the National Spatial Planning Programme was created in 1999, to give room for a multi-scale governance procedure, where different stakeholders would contribute knowledge on how to attain a degree of national sustainability.

The national planning agenda is guided by the transport, landscape and spatial planning objectives (IVL), and these define the spatial planning strategy of Luxembourg. In concrete terms, it represents the beginning of a complex process of reflection and consultation, for spatial coherence and sustainable development and its application is said to be dynamic and participatory. It is also a policy tool, which promotes certain fundamental governance principles, mainly coordination, cooperation and participation.

Coordination in this sense formulates a link between sectoral policies, from ministerial departments and their implementation at the local level. It generates cohesion in decision making and it is the basis for cooperation. As such, cooperation congregates all actors benefiting from space and raises knowledge and awareness on the needs for spatial evolution. On its part, participation is an ongoing process, reflecting the needs of the society.

Judging from these principles, it is understood that multilevel engagement is necessary for the employment of sustainable spatial policies in Luxembourg. Consequently, ENGOs have taken advantage of this, to address concerns about human-nature interaction and the resulting consequences of these, on the natural or built environment and, on human health.

Study Groups

Movement Ecologique (MECO): This is a grassroots movement whose purpose is to safeguard and promote fair living conditions that meet fundamental human aspirations with respect for the natural environment. The association promotes and implements alternatives in personal, socio-cultural and political, as well as economic development. Through the principles of ecology and democracy in landscape development, MECO organises series of actions dedicated to the most diverse subjects related to sustainable development, at national, regional or local level. The organisation is also involved in the politics of climate change and other environmental legislations, including sensitising the public on gigantic regional projects throughout Luxembourg. Generally, the movement advocates for novel methods in land use management.

Lëtzebuerger Natur- a Vulleschutzliga (LNVL): It represents an association for the conservation of bird species in Luxembourg. As a partner of Birds International, this ENGO has established a long history in the conservation of sensitive areas, especially water bodies, which are important sanctuaries for birds. They also advocate for the conservation of other animal species and promote scientific training on the migratory and breeding behaviour of birds, in some local and regional schools.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was applied in this study. In effect, two methods were used for data collection; literature review and semi-structured interviews.

A review of various documents helped in contextualising the research problem and in providing validity to the interview information. Selected documents were assessed based on questions such as; what is the document saying about ENGOS and, or landscape governance? On which particular topic area is the document focused on? Is the document related to the Luxembourgish context or not? Based on these, two types of reviews guided the investigation; a review of peer-reviewed literature and grey literature (Feyeh, 2016). The choice of peer-reviewed texts took into consideration the research idea (different knowledge sources about landscape governance). This made it multidisciplinary, cutting across geography, political and environmental sciences, including forestry. Grey literature, specifically, about spatial planning in Luxembourg was obtained from project files, policy documents from local and national authorities, reports, seminar papers and other useful internet sources related to spatial development in Luxembourg. These sources paved the way for an easy understanding of the general working conditions of ENGOS and other actors involved in landscape governance in Luxembourg.

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants from ENGOS, public agencies and local municipalities. Four were with members of the two ENGOS under investigation. That is two with members of MECO and two with actors of LNVL. Two sessions were organised with workers from the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure and three with local municipal administrators in Luxembourg City, Strassen and Valferdange. Selecting the interview partners was grounded on the reasoning that their respective cities are highly involved in landscape transformation and these individuals should have thorough theoretical and practical experiences about spatial governance in Luxembourg. The interview process was guided by, but not limited to;

- The structure of landscape governance in Luxembourg
- The roles and responsibilities of actors in landscape management
- The strategies of ENGOS to participate in landscape governance
- Specific examples and consequences of the participation of ENGOS
- Arguments for or against the participation of ENGOS

Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed with the help of the MAXQDA software for qualitative data analysis. The transcribed texts were coded and categorized according to the themes matching the research questions. The categorised information, later on, functioned as a foundation for establishing and analysing the results.

RESULTS

As acknowledged from the study, the decision-making structure for planning landscape transformation in Luxembourg lies within two main levels; national and local. The Ministry of

Sustainable Development and Infrastructure is the main actor at the national level and the communes are at the local level. ENGOs fit at the local level (See table 1 below). However, as gathered from the investigation, the strategies of these organisations go beyond the local sphere. For this reason, they consider themselves as regional institutions. Nonetheless, constitutionally, Luxembourg does not have a regional level of planning. Every development action is completed at the national or local level. Therefore, for this study, the regional level is but a blurred boundary, an unconstitutional level, made possible by the activities put in place by ENGOs, to influence landscape development.

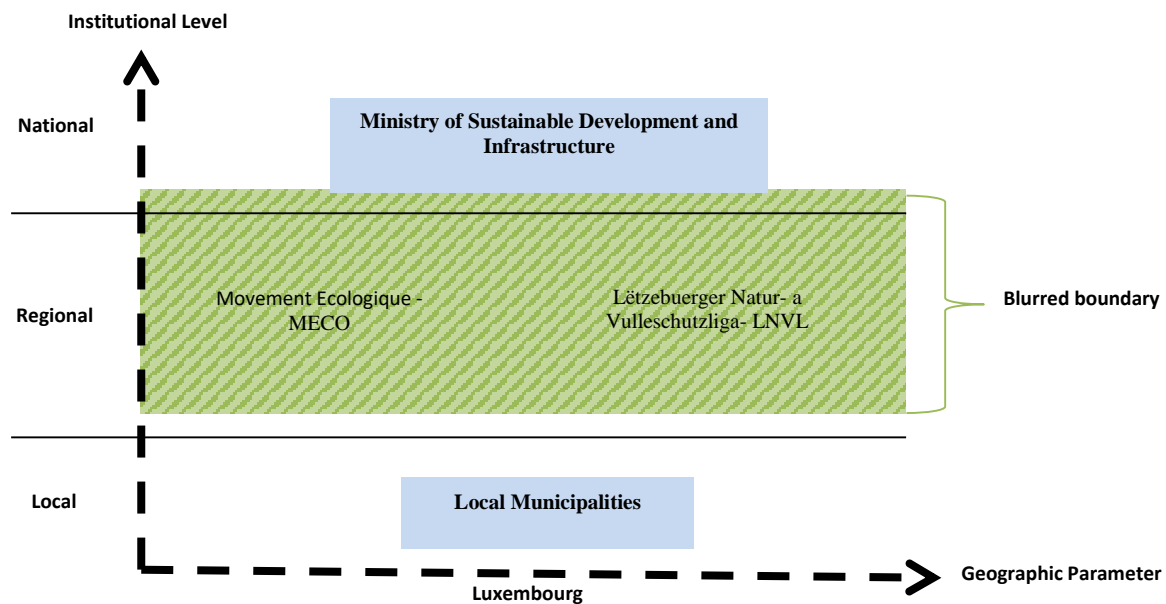


Figure 1: Scale of Landscape Governance in Luxembourg

Source: Own work

The Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure is the superior actor that supervises projects of territorial development. It works in close collaboration with the communes, given that the latter manages local landscapes, upon which development initiatives are carried out. Also, through the Department of Environment and Nature Protection, the Ministry provides positive as well as negative criticisms of development schemes. The communes make available authorisation for project execution and have a good network with local farmers; holders of about 50% of the total land surface in Luxembourg. This group of actors exerts great influence over planning decision of many untransformed surfaces.

DISCUSSION

For many years, before the introduction of the national planning documents, landscape planning in Luxembourg was politically oriented, at the national level. However, today, the situation is changing, though not completely, as many decisions are still being made without a rhythm of participatory governance. This change might be correlated with the rescaling of state space, to involve other institutions (Brenner 2004 and Pierre 1999), in policies of territorial development. This has led to considerable improvements in discussion among diverse stakeholders, about the visible alterations and challenges on the socio-physical environment.

Consequently, the notion of landscape governance in this country is becoming very complex (Panker, 2009), defined by economic, social and environmental forces and values (Wascher 2000). These socio-natural connections (Wascher 2000) have led to the creation of new platforms for co-management, with greater interest in achieving sustainable territories, through negotiation. From this, it is obvious that landscape management in Luxembourg is evolving from a stage of state supremacy to a complex and bonding phase that demands a more inclusive approach to territorial development. The views of non-state or private and civil society organisations (known here as ENGOS) have become important and these institutions have turned out to be essential partners, in almost all stages of landscape development.

In Luxembourg, ENGOS are still considered passive actors (Pretty et al, 1995); most often informed at a later stage about what is going to happen, or had occurred, relative to landscape development. Landscape management in this country is yet to be a dynamic process where private and public actors focus on collective learning (Rey-Valette et al, 2010), to solve common territorial problems (Bagnasco and Gales, 2000). Hoping that things might change with the introduction of the Sectorial Plan in 2013, the situation is more or less a centralised system where the government is the major decision body. Generally, landscape governance, in this case, is not making room for formal and informal processes of interaction (Janin Rivolin, 2010), even though conditioned by a national planning system.

This situation is undermining the role of ENGOS in promoting sustainable development (Edwards, 2001). Any procedure of landscape governance should at least improve territorial cooperation at different levels. Explained in a better way by Juda (1999), the process should promote arrangements among institutions on how resources are utilized; how problems and opportunities are evaluated and analysed; what behaviour is deemed acceptable or forbidden; and what rules and sanctions are applied to affect the pattern of land use. It should also provide a new platform that brings all relevant stakeholders to an institutional space, for the co-management of landscapes (Finlayson, 2014).

ENGOS were identified as part of the nine sectors selected by governments at the Rio Summit in 1991, under the well-known Agenda 21, to assist communities and to promote sustainable development (Nikkhah and Redzuan, 2010). Consequently, in the twenty-first century, these organisations have to answer some important questions in relation to their strategies and this is how their legitimacy could be claimed (Fowler, 1998). For the reason that ENGOS in Luxembourg are not actively involved in policies of landscape management, these associations have resorted to two methods of engagement in landscape planning.

a) Engaging through self-mobilisation

ENGOS make use of this strategy to organise themselves with other civil organisations and push for active participation in regional planning. In this process, regional projects are being kept on a standstill, while the problem of active participation is looked upon. Gathered from the investigation, ENGOS are most often being consulted by agents from national or local levels, to come up with proposals on how to make intended projects for landscape development better. This method is anticipated to improve relations between government and the community (Kaur, 2007). Although the practice allows non-state actors interested in or affected by regional development projects to offer their points of view before a decision is made, it does not truly account for active participation. This is because public agents are under no obligation to take on views from ENGOS (Pretty et al, 1995). Again, even if consultation should improve participation, the above method does not allow ENGOS in Luxembourg to participate in the

initial stages of project planning, and this has made participation a word of fantasy (Kaur, 2007). Consultation in a more general sense should include beneficiaries and other groups, their needs and expectations and the executing agencies and planners (Janin Rivolin, 2010).

For the fact that consultation is not a good enough process, ENGOs are willing to embark on self-mobilised efforts. This is exactly what is meant by taking independent initiatives to change processes (Pretty et al, 1995). Self-mobilisation is a form of participatory governance (Mohan, 2001), which appreciates the “bottom-up” approach that characteristically incorporates local actors, their knowledge, skills, and experiences (Smith 2008), to better the economic, social and environmental conditions (Singh. 2008), of any community. It is a forceful link between government and its people, a new professionalism, to obtain predefined objectives and for enabling the empowerment of private actors (Chambers, 1997).

An example of self-mobilised action was in December 2014, where MECO came in contact with the Syndicat de Travailleurs, and both associations requested for active involvement in decisions related to planning the A3 cross-border transport system in Luxembourg. Again, by early 2017, these organisations were still campaigning for an ecologically appropriate means of transport, with the basic argument that extending the A3 motorway would increase the driving tracks for cross-border workers to three tracks, instead of two. It was understood here that the whole idea is a hidden agenda, orchestrated by the government and local administrators to benefit from thousands of cross-border commuters who come to Luxembourg every day for cheaper fuel. It is, therefore, an economic policy, not qualitative growth, taken into consideration the increase in CO2 emission. However, public actors are reluctant about the approach of self-mobilisation. They blame it for blocking or delaying projects that are meant for national or local economic development. Simply:

“ENGOs are out to criticise and slow down developmental projects shaped by the government and other economic actors involved in territorial development” (a planning specialist from the Department of Territorial Development).

Contrary to this claim, some members of ENGOs are stressing the notion that:

“If we (ENGOs) are consulted at the beginning of planning processes, time would be gained and our economy improved” (a member of MECO).

From these arguments, it can be concluded that the aspect of time (reflected here as the early stages of planning) is indispensable, and this qualifies consultation as an important instrument of participation, even though it entails certain transaction costs.

b) Engaging using legal actions

ENGOs are making use of this strategy to place lawsuits at national and international courts, against projects that are considered to be unsustainable. Guided by the EU legislation on territorial protection, precisely within the framework of NATURA 2000 and the Aarhus convention, ENGOs are tabling rational appeals against development initiatives that temper on the smooth functioning of natural landscapes. This strategy gives an idea of the degree of power ENGOs have, to influence policies for national development. The Aarhus convention was integrated into Luxembourgish law on nature protection in 2004. This has proven to be a solid foundation for ENGOs to exhibit certain qualities (access to justice), about environmental governance. It has also helped in mobilising support from the media and other non-governmental organisations because of its emphasis on public participation in environmental

decision-making (UNECE, 2014). The application of this tool lies in the reasoning that ENGOS would be recognised as active actors and be involved in the initial stages of landscape planning. This is because:

“Most often, our (ENGOS) participation in projects has been through some form of reaction, not active involvement in the development of these projects... There is a need for earliest and proper involvement of all actors at the initial stage of planning. This will give a proper analysis as to which project could be termed appropriate for execution. It will also help to manage time and eliminate the perception that ENGOS prolong planning decisions through protest. If the above is not guaranteed, ENGOS will be forced to block or delay certain projects through judicial processes, guided by EU legislation. This might have substantial effects on the society for years” (a member of LNVL).

In 2010, for example, a chemical centre for agricultural inputs was to be located in Pecten, a locality near Mersch, in the north of Luxembourg City. This industry was destined to be part of a landscape, conceptualised for nature protection and for agriculture. Members of the LNVL thought it was not right for an industry of this category to be located in a pristine environment, between agricultural fields, a good habitat for birds and other animal species. As a result, the organisation applied the strategy of participation by legal action, with support from MECO. Their appeal was granted by the European court of justice and the chemical centre was relocated to an alternative site, far-off in the North, in the industrial zone of Comer Berg.

Another example was in 2008, in the surrounding area of the Château de Meysembourg, in the center region of Luxembourg. This area harbours a big and beautiful park, with great cultural and touristic potentials. Local policymakers dreamt of transforming the site into an aesthetic high class social residential area, with hotels and golf courses. However, with the efforts of MECO and LNVL, the local population was informed about the uniqueness of this landscape. This reconstructed a sense of belonging and generated grass root support for the ENGOS to legally block the project.

CONCLUSION

Irrespective of the central role that ENGOS play in contemporary landscape policies, their strategies have hardly gained scholarly recognition. To fill this gap, this study developed a simple methodology, with concrete examples that explained how ENGOS influence landscape development in Luxembourg.

Based on this analysis, the study acknowledged that a well-established governance process, which is based on the early and active involvement of all stakeholders, seems to be the foundation for innovative solutions in landscape management in Luxembourg. The cases presented in this study have highlighted that stakeholders at the national or local level are reluctant to recognise the role played by non-state actors in landscape governance. ENGOS are not predominantly considered as active partners in reforms of landscape development. Nevertheless, the strength of ENGOS, through their strategies has to an extent induced change and stimulates stakeholders' engagement, as a legitimate process of integrated landscape management. These are the twenty-first century ENGOS (Fowler, 1998).

If the engagement of ENGOS is well managed, it might have huge sustainability outcomes. A major potential of such organisations is the ability to launch strategies that would promote socio-

ecological integrity and improve coordination across different scales. However, a major challenge, as observed, in the context of this study, would be to set up platforms for the involvement of private stakeholders at the initial stages of planning. Landscape governance as described in the literature is a medium for multilevel stakeholders (Newig et al., 2016), to deliberate complex processes (Janin Rivolin, 2010). The examples presented have demonstrated that there is still a strong dominance by public agencies; an indication of weak governance in sense of territorial development. Changing the way ENGOS are being conceptualised would add meaning to the role of these organisations and consequently lead to efficient planning policies.

While the dominance of national and communal actors could be overlooked as a factor of time and transaction cost, engaging ENGOS at an early stage in planning is relevant, for eliminating delays. This is one the main denominators to ensure the quality of regional projects and to reduce the gap between private and the public authorities. Creating effective networks across scales is a major factor for improving specialised knowledge on landscape governance (Görg, 2007). This is the spirit of collaboration, a rational way of accommodating multiple interests, to increase efficiency (Cater and Gronow, 2005). Therefore, for the future, it is better to shape a level playing field that will open up channels, for debating and adjusting regional projects. This will give stakeholders the opportunity to actively participate in project initiation, implementation and monitoring, including evaluation.

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