



LOCAL PLANNING WITH ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

KEY MESSAGES

Participatory local planning with ecosystem services (ES) can **strengthen joint decision making** because it assists in better understanding the relationship between society and the environment, includes diverse views and needs, co-produces knowledge, increases transparency, and helps to deal with trade-offs and conflicts. When conducted properly, the resulting plans will lead to more co-ownership, higher public support, a higher likelihood of implementation, and is likely to save time in the long run. Implementation of such plans increases the chances to obtain more sustainable outcomes and enhanced societal well-being.

The following interventions can help to generate **suitable conditions** for participatory local planning with ecosystem services:

- Involve all relevant actors as early as possible in the planning process.
- Make use of a neutral broker organisation with strong facilitation skills.
- Invest in the development and use of ES knowledge that can easily be mobilised and communicated to support group deliberation.
- Provide incentives for government agencies and stakeholders to develop and implement a joint local plan/vision.
- Reform governance structures and instruments that hamper integrated regional development or cause unintended impacts.

SPATIAL PLANNING AT LOCAL SCALE: A POTENTIALLY TRICKY PROCESS

What does a city plan, rural development plan, watershed management plan, protected area plan have in common? They all need to reconcile needs of many different stakeholders, while considering the biophysical possibilities of the area. The path to a widely-supported vision or plan can, however, be long and may face many hurdles. Local stakeholders might only be interested in their own needs, or they have a participation fatigue because earlier consultations delivered

no clear results. Implementation of sectoral policies may interfere with other policies, or cause undesired impacts at local level. Such situations can slow down the development of new plans, and even trigger environmental degradation. For local stakeholders this can be quite confusing, and result in distrust towards planning processes and government agencies. Such challenges are quite common, and are usually caused by institutional fragmentation, limited local institutional capacity to manage complex processes, and/or conflicting land-use activities.

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY: PARTICIPATORY PLANNING WITH ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Insights from OpenNESS case studies and literature indicate that the combination of participatory planning together with ecosystem services is a promising approach to overcome some of the above challenges. The **goal** of participatory planning with ecosystem services is to co-produce a widely-supported vision or plan for a specific area, which takes into serious consideration local stakeholder and sectoral needs and goals, generates societal benefits, and strengthens ecosystem capacity.

There are **different contexts** where participatory planning or envisioning with ES can make an important contribution:

1. Contexts where it is required to develop **multifunctional landscapes** that meet different needs at the same time (in contrast to claims for mono-functional

use). In this case, all ES which are relevant to stakeholders need to be considered to identify potential win-wins between ES-uses. However, as win-wins are not always possible, the ES approach can also help to better understand and minimize trade-offs between different uses.

2. Contexts where a better match between **supply and demand** of certain ES is required. This can be obtained by either increasing the supply or access to ES (e.g. more urban green, or making green areas more accessible) and/or by reducing or managing the demand for certain ES (e.g. reducing water pollution will require less demand for water purification).
3. Contexts where a better balancing between the **benefit(s) and burden(s)** of a desired ES is requested. The stakeholders who are responsible for providing certain ES (e.g. forest managers, dairy farmers) are often not the same as the ones who

Land consolidation project De Cirkel (Belgium): The goal of the project was to develop public support for new nature development in agricultural area. Social valuation of ES by inhabitants enabled to identify options to make the landscape more accessible and to involve the tourism sector.



Antarctic Beech native forest in Patagonia (Argentina): The challenge of silvo-pastoral use of Beech forest is to keep the balance between production and biodiversity goals. To aid decision making, participatory workshops were organized with the private sector, government agencies and NGO's, where results of ES tools were presented (e.g. cascade model, photo series analysis).



Cairngorms National Park (Scotland): In order to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities, the national park required knowledge on the natural and cultural heritage and how the natural resources can be used. Social and digital surveys revealed recreational hotspots in the north-east of the park, which enabled mobilising funding to improve walking paths.



Promoting Agricultural landscapes around Madrid (Spain): The conversion of multi-functional landscapes into more intensive ones in some areas and its abandonment in others, threatens the agro-ecosystem preservation and the social, cultural identity and economic viability of rural populations. Participatory ES mapping is used to develop alternative strategies to understand land-use changes in the last 50 years and to cope with this trend.



benefit from them (e.g. tourists, city protected for floods, bird watchers). ES analysis can help to visualize these imbalances and aid to design instruments to compensate the ones who carry the burden (e.g. by tourism tax, farmer payments for wildlife damage).

- Contexts where more **sustainable practices** are required. By taking into consideration ecosystem capacity and supporting ES, new management practices can be designed (e.g. organic farming, agro-ecological practices, restoration of open mines).

ADVANTAGES AND POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Compared to sectoral planning, participatory planning with ES results in several **advantages**:

Individual impacts:	Contribution to the quality of vision/plan:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change attitudes and opinions. Increase insights in human-nature interactions (e.g. linkage between the land-use patterns, ecosystems, biodiversity and their contribution to human well-being). Increase awareness on the benefits of the developed plans (e.g. need for adaptive strategies for sustainable development; multiple benefits to be gained by collaborative management of landscapes). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify key social concerns in the focus area, and help to deal with multiple societal demands. Widen the scope of considered ES provided by landscapes. Identify and communicate win-wins and trade-offs between planning options, and on- and off-site interests.
Group dynamics:	Implementation of vision/plan:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move the group discussion to a more positive discourse (thanks to ES being more solution-oriented concept). Increase mutual understanding about other stakeholder needs and their underlying motivations. Enable social learning by integration of different knowledge types, group reflection and development of a shared knowledge base. Stimulate networking and trust-building among participants. Help to overcome conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulate collaboration among involved stakeholders. Increase chances for translating plans and ideas into actions and joint implementation by partners. Help to overcome conflicts. Improve opportunities for developing targeted response measures. Reveal the implications for governance. More likely to improve ecosystems health, sustainable use and human well-being.

There are also potential challenges with this way of working:

- Perceptions regarding the ES concept:** While some stakeholders consider that the ES concept promotes a 'green agenda', others are worried that it is too much focused on economic valuation and might even lead to 'commodification' of nature. Still others find it too complex and scientific. This concern can be addressed by covering a broad range of

values, including monetary and non-monetary values.

- Off-site impacts** of ES planning are sometimes ignored or forgotten if the focus is too much on local issues (e.g. downstream impacts of upstream land-use decisions), and hence need conscious attention.
- Changes over time:** Not only the delivery of ES, but also human preferences might change over time. If planning is primarily based on current supplies and demands for ES, it may create a 'lock-in' and loose adaptive

capacities for ES provision in the long-run. This can be addressed by adaptive planning processes, which are sensitive for future ES demands and underlying ecosystem processes.

- **Participatory process:** There are challenges which are typical for all participatory processes, such as how to deal with inflated expectations, power imbalances, distrust, participation fatigue, representation bias, and absence of certain stakeholder groups. These can be addressed by proper process design and skilled facilitation. However, it is not always necessary to reach a consensus; it is often more realistic to search for a solution that can be accepted by all involved stakeholders (= consent).
- **Implementation gap:** Ambitious visions or plans might stay 'in the drawer' because of established procedures, sectoral thinking, legal hurdles, administrative boundaries and weak implementation capacity. A way to cope with it is by analysing and addressing potential implementation gaps before a planning process is started, or linking the policy cycle at higher levels (e.g. EU CAP).

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CASE STUDIES

Participatory planning with ecosystem services can take many forms and shapes. However, some generic lessons learned could be drawn:

- Arrange for the **right starting conditions**. A clear scope and mandate are important to start a planning process. In addition, it is very useful to clarify beforehand the specific planning instruments and decision making processes in which the ES results will be applied. Further, it is important that all relevant actors are involved from the beginning, and it is helpful when stakeholders feel a sense of urgency and when they are familiar with participatory planning processes.
- Design a tailor-made and flexible **participatory process**. The involvement of a

broker organisation with strong facilitation skills and an appropriate forum for informal interaction will improve the chances for success. Identifying the needs and interests of stakeholders is a good way to start a process. In order to guarantee transparency, it is essential to document how all decisions were made.

- **Use and communicate ES information** in a flexible way. A diversity of ES tools can be used to address specific needs, and ES language can be adapted to the context (possible alternatives for ES are: landscape services, nature contribution to people). The benefits that stakeholders derive from ES can be addressed by being open for the diversity of values they hold for landscapes, nature and ecosystems. At the same time it is also important to keep in mind the sustainability of ES supply. Finally, it is important to deliver ES information in the appropriate format, scale and time, and to be transparent about the strengths and weaknesses of the ES tools used.

Key references

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