

The role of social benefits for collective action: The case of a German Orchard Initiative

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of social benefits for collective land management action in the case of the traditional orchard initiative FÖG. As other voluntary organisations, today, it is struggling with a decreasing number of members. We used scenario development in order to develop together with the FÖG and additional external stakeholders three visions for the future of the initiative. In the paper we will present the different options developed. We will show how scenario-thinking helped to unlock the recognition of social benefits. We come to the conclusion that if social benefits of land management are recognised it will increase the resilience of a collective action as these help to build up social capital and induce motivation and activation of stakeholders.

1 Introduction

In Europe, large traditional orchard areas can be found in Northern Spain, France, Luxemburg, Germany, Swiss, Austria and Slovenia. These characteristic elements of cultural landscapes show a decline in quality and quantity since the 1950s. Intensively managed plantations were more profitable and agricultural policies in Germany supported clearing of traditional orchard meadows. With these changes in land management ecologically beneficial outcomes of orchard meadows like the preservation of habitats, improvement of soil and water quality, carbon sequestration among others were lost. Orchard meadows are not only relevant for ecological reasons but also result socially beneficial outcomes which contribute to human well-being, such as the visual quality of the landscape, providing spaces for experiencing and learning from nature, for recreation and interaction with other human beings.

In response to this loss, in Germany awareness for the decline arouse among nature conservationists in the 1980s, leading to a number of collective actions which intended to

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maintain the traditional orchards. The Support Association for Regional Traditional Orchard Cultivation (*Fördergemeinschaft regionaler Streuobstbau*, FÖG) is one of the oldest of its kind in Germany. It was established in 1989 in order to maintain the regionally typical traditional orchards through a supplier premium. As many other associations the FÖG is challenged by demographic change and the need to attract additional members. After a survey among its members showed that only few members are willing to take up responsibility and perform tasks for the initiative. It was clear that the FÖG association will have to be liquidated, if current members withdraw from the board of directors and no successors can be found.

We used scenario development in order to develop together with the FÖG and additional external stakeholders three visions for the future of the FÖG. Based on these scenarios we developed a strategy to adapt the initiative's work and structure to demographic change and at the same time enable it to cope with further future challenges. In the paper we will present the different options developed and discuss the role social benefits for collective action.

2 The Case Study

2.1 Research Process

The FÖG was selected as a case study for the EU HORIZON 2020 project PEGASUS (Public Ecosystem Goods And Services from land management – Unlocking the Synergies, 2015-2018). Within the PEGASUS project various forms of collective action and of land management are examined with the aim to improve the provision of ecosystem services and public goods from agriculture and forestry (www.pegasus.ieep.eu).

As one of the oldest supplier premium initiatives in Germany, it seemed predestined to be examined within the project. When the PEGASUS team approached the FÖG in its precarious situation it was agreed that the researchers provide consultation and in return are provided with insights in the processes of a mature collective action.

The PEGASUS team accompanied the setting up of a task force 'Future'. It included FÖG representatives including the executive officer and members of the board, a representative of the cooperating press house, and external experts from other orchard meadow initiatives as well as representatives from two environmental NGOs, which are also FÖG members. The PEGASUS team facilitated four scenario development workshops to elaborate pathways for the future development and first steps for action.

This approach was chosen to capture potential options for development and use scenarios to portray a desirable FÖG as means to motivate volunteers to work on the realization of the respective scenario. During the scenario development process the PEGASUS team analysed how a collective action such as the FÖG contribute to socially and environmentally beneficial

outcomes from the management of orchard meadows. We analysed the conditions such collective actions operate in and the specific challenges the FÖG is confronted with.

2.2 The Support Association for Regional Traditional Orchard Cultivation

The FÖG operates in parts of the three natural areas *Bergstraße*, *Odenwald* and *Kraichgau*, approximately 2,973 km², covering the southern part of the state Hesse and the North-West of the state Baden-Wuerttemberg. The areas cover parts of the Rhine-Neckar and Rhine-Maine metropolitan regions. In 2013, the initiative had 54 producing members who cultivated traditional orchards on 125 ha and additional 35 supporting members who are not producers themselves. These are interested individuals as well as three local groups of the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union Germany (*Naturschutzbund*, NABU), one BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) group and the city of *Mannheim*. In 2016, there are 45 producers and 36 supporting members left. None of the producers is managing orchards as main occupation. Mostly they continue to cultivate orchards that have been in family ownership for generations. During the workshops it became clear that it is not their chosen hobby but often a family obligation to preserve the own orchard meadows.

In the beginning, the initiative carried out marketing and sales of the juice itself, which changed to the press house *Falter Fruchtsaft* in 2002. The FÖG has been certified organic according to the EU organic regulation in 1998. It now funds pruning of the trees, as half of the trees are currently in bad condition (not well maintained due to age structure of producers as well as economic reasons: ‘Price of fruit gives no real incentive for maintaining the trees and some producers are not depending on the income’, FÖG 2015) and they fund planting of young trees. In addition, they offer fruit tree pruning courses open to the public.

2.2.1 Beneficial outcomes from orchard management

A number of studies has been carried out, reflecting on the topic of traditional orchards and the quantity and quality of ecologically and socially beneficial outcomes (ESBOs) (e.g. Lucke et al. 1992, Herzog 1998, 2000, Weller 2006, Plieninger 2011, NABU 2015). The most frequently named and communicated ESBOs provided (e.g. NABU 2015) are

- biodiversity in terms of ecological diversity (up to 5000 animal and plant species may exist on an orchard meadow), genetic diversity (German orchard meadows comprise 3000 varieties of fruit species) and pollination
- landscape character (as orchard meadows have been a characteristic landscape element contributing to the distinctness of the landscape in the last centuries) and related

cultural heritage (preservation of the cultural landscape through managing this traditional farming system)

- Educational activities (pruning courses, information on orchards)

Other ESBOs which can be associated comprise

- Sustainable production of food (orchard meadows provide old fruit varieties which are suitable for allergy sufferers; in contrast to plantations the production is more sustainable, no use of pesticides etc.) and maintenance of the production potential.
- Water quality and supply, soil protection, and climate mitigation (orchard meadows are a permanent culture with no groundwater input, no use of heavy machinery, grass prevents soil erosion, and grassland contributes to carbon sequestration)
- Climate adaptation (orchard meadows improve the local/micro climate)
- Outdoor recreation and experience of nature (either by enjoying the traditional landscape or by managing orchard meadows)
- Rural vitality (Numerous activities and events related to the maintenance of orchard meadows, harvesting as well as communication and information contribute to active and socially resilient rural communities)

All of these ESBOs are provided through traditional orchard cultivation. The FÖG focused in the beginning on biodiversity and landscape management. Managing orchard meadows within a premium scheme does to some extent lead to economic gains. Nevertheless, with some exceptions orchard meadows do not provide substantial income for its managers. Socially beneficial outcomes are widely neglected within the examined initiative. Therefore ecologically beneficial outcomes are still the major driver for the current volunteers in the FÖG.

2.2.2 Challenges of the collective action

The FÖG was founded in 1989, when the institutionalization of the environmental movement started (cf. Brand 1999: 252). Activists of the environmental movement established the FÖG initiative as a market based approach to preserve orchard meadows. This is a reaction to policy incentives between the 1950s and 1980s, which had been aimed at intensification of apple production, thus increasing productivity. The founders of the FÖG wanted to preserve orchard meadows, as they knew about the habitat function. In addition, the change of the traditional landscape was another motivation

As one of the first supplier premium initiatives, the FÖG established its innovative approach to preserve orchard meadows which was based on the idea “protection through use” (interview statement FÖG founder). It implied long-term collaboration of environmental

activists, farmers, and press house(s). The main mechanism was to raise the interest of producers through a supplier premium, and raise consumer awareness through making them pay the surcharge. The premium scheme is organised by volunteers of the FÖG, who serve as contact person for the press house and manage the third party certification process according to the EU Eco-regulation.

For FÖG producers their orchard meadows are often a family heritage they want to preserve and enjoy preserving. The next generation however often lives at a distant place or hardly shows any interest in cultivating orchard meadows for themselves. The often aging producers are left managing their orchards as long as possible before the orchard meadows are no longer maintained. The once enthusiastic volunteers are increasingly unwilling to continue their work and withdrawing from their positions in the FÖG. The executive office conducted a survey among the FÖG members. The very little return showed an even smaller willingness to step up and take responsibility for the association.

In conclusion, the initiative has established processes where individuals organise a premium scheme based on the organic certification of orchard meadows and the marketing of apple juice through a partnering press house. Aging and inactive members are the biggest challenge to the initiative. If the initiative is not able to replace its withdrawing members, it will not be able to continue its work organising the premium scheme and preserving orchard meadows.

2.3 Scenarios for ecologically and socially beneficial outcomes from orchard management

All three scenarios and strategies that are the results of the scenario development process appear plausible and they are possible to become reality, if the necessary steps are taken. Each scenario provides another approach for action, which leads to varying answers to the previously described challenges of the FÖG.

- Scenario One “**The legacy of the FÖG**”: It assumes the liquidation of the FÖG association. Due to a shrinking amount of members and their inability to contribute volunteer work to the association the general meeting decides to discontinue the work of the FÖG. Many small-scale producers lose the status as certified organic producers. The administrative burden is simply too high. The few larger producers, which have organized their own certification process continue to produce organic apples from orchard meadows. With the harvest from additional organic producers the press house replaces the FÖG-product line with another organic line which includes former FÖG

members. Alternative distribution channels such as health food stores or the marketing of press house product coupons can be developed by individuals of former FÖG producers.

In order to facilitate continuing cultivation of the orchard meadows the last task of FÖG volunteers is to develop a guideline for producers. It includes useful information, experiences and contacts that were acquired over the years of running the FÖG. Nevertheless, it is expected that with growing age and without the premium for organic production most small-scale producers discontinue the cultivation of their orchards. Additional support for remaining producers is provided by other regional initiatives. Supporting members can join other regional initiatives, if they want to volunteer for environmental protection projects or support such causes financially. Alternatively, they have the opportunity to work as a certified orchard meadow educator and engage in awareness raising activities for the role of orchard meadows.

It is not a strategy to overcome the weaknesses but a way to preserve as many orchard meadows as possible. The development of a comprehensive guidebook with information and contacts is the last planned activity of the FÖG. Former members will be equipped with it to support their continuing management of orchards. The participants of the future scenario development workshops expect that 50 % of the orchard meadows will be lost after the liquidation of the FÖG within 5 to 10 years' time.

- Scenario Two “**The producer’s organization FÖG**”: This scenario builds on the current focus on economic activities but with redistributed responsibilities. The FÖG association acts as head for three regional branches. By decentralising responsibilities into the regions all members are encouraged to engage and contribute to the FÖG association. Every branch sends one delegate to the FÖG executive board. On the one hand, this ensures regional representation, on the other hand it offers a solution to the issue of filling posts. Every regional branch acts as its own producer organization and is responsible for product development and marketing as well as receiving donations etc. This means that one continues producing only FÖG-juice, whereas another regional branch develops new products with another producer. The third regional branch decides to contribute to the FÖG juice while also developing an additional product.

The executive office provides services for the regional branches such as organizing the process for certifying the production, public relations beyond the

regional branches, or quality management. To provide a professional service the membership fees have increased. Supporting members can continue their commitment for the environment by joining other NGOs or initiatives. Small-scale producers who were only interested in producing their own juice have left the association.

If all producing members stayed in the FÖG association, the ESBO provision remains at the current level. Regional branches, however, could also decide to expand or cease their production which implicates a corresponding impact on the ESBO provision.

- Scenario three **“The vital association FÖG”**: It foresees to revitalize the FÖG and to establish it as regional platform for orchard meadow preservation. To improve the regional embeddedness it established three regional branches. The branches are responsible for the activities and products of the FÖG. To ensure their representation each region sends one of its members to the executive board of the FÖG.

In addition to the FÖG juice produced by the partnering press house, the regional branches can develop and market additional products such as cider, apple rings or pectin. Overall, the new activities increase the amount of processed apples from orchard meadows. The association also participates or organizes regional events like farmer’s markets, fairs etc. These and public relation activities contribute to the aim to increase the awareness of the importance of orchard meadows as provider of high quality apple products, as traditional cultural landscape but also as space to experience nature and interact with others or for biodiversity, soil and water quality and so on.

A clear distribution of responsibility between the executive board and the executive office improves the work efficiency. The first is responsible for strategic decisions and takes responsibility for FÖG projects. The latter is still managing the certification process for its members and public relations but also acquires public funds for projects. However, the actual implementation of project is executed by the board or project promoter from the regional branches e.g. organized in a project group.

As a regional platform with active members the association is well connected with regional stakeholders ranging from mayors to institutions such as LEADER Local Action Groups, Nature and Geo Parks, NGOs or other initiatives. Together they share resources, e.g. for public relations activities, develop landscape maintenance measures or activities for families etc.

This scenario suggests many more activities and the collaboration with other regional initiatives. Therefore, the ESBO provision is expected to grow or is at least to be saved at the current level.

Similar to the survey conducted by the executive office, all workshops showed that almost all producing members will not engage in additional activities beyond their current involvement in the preservation of orchard meadows but have the wish to continue deliver apples and receive a supplier premium. This means scenario 1 will be highly likely as soon as further volunteers withdraw and duties can no longer be performed. In contrast, regional stakeholders (e.g. from LEADER LAGs in the region) mostly argued for focusing resources on maintaining the supplier premium model (scenario 2) or pleaded in favour of scenario 3 to share the load of activities between different actors.

3 The role of social benefits

“Most of the people simply don’t see the connections between orchards and biodiversity anymore. And if you don’t know anything about the rich flora and fauna which is there, you won’t do anything to maintain it.”
(Interview statement).

Without increased public interest and awareness for the importance of preserving biodiversity the FÖG is struggling to find supporters for its cause. The interview statement above describes precisely the limits of the FÖG approach and its narrow focus on ecologically beneficial outcomes. And as long as the management of orchard meadows is hardly a business case, economically beneficial outcomes will also scarcely serve as driver for the preservation of traditional orchards.

Approaches targeting socially beneficial outcomes however offer a variety of solutions for initiatives such as the FÖG. Scenario 2 and 3, which both foresee a strategy for the continuation of the FÖG, draw on socially beneficial outcomes, however, with a different focus. Socially beneficial outcomes focus on interaction which can allow unique experiences in the context of orchard meadows. Approaches for the exploitation of socially beneficial outcomes can be the following:

- Events taking place on orchard meadows: Events on orchard meadows, e.g. for joint harvesting or maintenance activities provide orchard managers with support while offering volunteers the opportunity to participate in such a group event that includes experiencing nature, learning about the cultivation of apples etc. This approach

targets individuals and is attractive for (especially aging) producers with increasing need of support on the one hand and a (urban) population which values regionally produced products and is interested in a meaningful hobby. The incentive for volunteers is to pursue an attractive activity and maybe even receive a share of the harvest or processed products in return. The incentive for land managers lies in the reduction of work.

- Individual or collective volunteering: Tree adoption or other forms of taking responsibility means to participate in management activities. This approach targets individuals, families or groups such school classes or others. This approach allows a more long-term engagement with orchard meadows
- Traditional, cultural or regular events: Farmer's markets or other kind of public events or fairs provide not only the opportunity to sell the own products. Besides the economic effects, these events offer the opportunity to approach the wider public that has not necessarily been in touch with the own cause. It allows to present the work of the initiative, raise awareness for sustainable consumption and the relevance of in this case orchard meadows as well as attract new members.
- Organized activities including learning and experiencing orchard meadows. Guided tours present orchard meadows and their role for society to participants. Target groups can range from individuals to families, cover all ages depending on the concept of the activity, and cover various topics related to the environment and society (biodiversity, sustainable consumption etc.).

The first two approaches directly contribute to the management of orchard meadows. They provide support for (e.g. aging) land managers or volunteers for administrative tasks within the association. In return they can be treated with the harvest or processed products (e.g. juice) as acknowledgement for their work and incentive for continuing their work. The third and fourth approaches have an awareness raising effect, which can be focused on orchard meadows but also any other related topic in this context (e.g. sustainable consumption, biodiversity etc.).

A variety of stakeholders can be included in organising these activities, depending on the specific context. They range from land managers, schools, social welfare organisations, Nature and Geo Parks, NGOs, and others. The great diversity is also reflected in the target groups, like families, individuals, groups, classes, children, adults, enterprises etc.

During the scenario development process the participants who were managing orchards as well as the environmentalists often explained how much work proper orchard cultivation means. Approaches emphasising socially beneficial outcomes provide an alternative viewpoint.

Work that is put into the management of orchard meadows is a hobby or an experience, e.g. for the whole family. Activities are not work but an event. Instead of struggling with managing job, family and volunteering, these approaches offer leisure time activities. Instead of additional work, volunteering becomes a purposeful hobby.

Initiatives such as the FÖG with a strong focus on ecologically beneficial outcomes can change their strategy and emphasise the provided socially beneficial outcomes. As a result new target groups for activities, and members can be approached. New interests can be combined and collaborations implemented. Collaborating partners need less resources to achieve a potentially higher impact or visibility and public profile. These aspects have a strong impact on organising the tasks of the FÖG. Indirectly but not necessarily less important is communication as prerequisite for the applied premium scheme. Consumers can actively choose to support the preservation of orchard meadows as long as a market for sustainably or regionally products exists. Consumer awareness and appreciation is volatile can be increased by approaches emphasising socially beneficial outcomes. This can be an effective response to the biggest disadvantage of the premium approach.

As mentioned above, various stakeholders and potential partners for collaboration were participating in the scenario development process. They all offered their support and explained how and in what respect they are willing to work with the FÖG association. Cooperation between initiatives with similar objectives have the potential to create win-win-opportunities. The scenario development workshops envisioned a stronger cooperation between members but also with external stakeholders. Two scenarios foresee to establish a wider network of partners. This network should ensure support of the public and from public officials but also reduce resource constraint through cooperation with other stakeholders.

Shared interests in environmental protection or economic activities can contribute to building this wider support network. However, by targeting socially beneficial outcomes initiatives such as the FÖG are a potential partner for many more stakeholders, e.g. from the field of education, regional marketing initiatives, tourism, social service organisations etc. This also includes the contact to policy maker on the local and regional level as well as organisations such as LEADER LAGs, Nature and Geo Parks, NGOs and others. Already the scenario development workshop showed how an exchange between initiatives can contribute to the development of social capital. The implementation of such a network has the potential to increase social capital of the parties involved even more and allows to perpetuate collaborations.

4 Conclusion

When analysing the social and ecological benefits of the land management activity, it became clear that the ecological benefits were in the focus of the initiative and key factor for the foundation of the FÖG in 1989. In contrast, we didn't find any awareness of the social benefits the management of traditional orchards can provide. The action-oriented approach in combination with ESBO thinking helped to see that there is a lack of awareness and appreciation of socially beneficial outcomes, which in turn increased the desolate situation of the FÖG (aging of members, lack of new members, reduced engagement of remaining members).

For the FÖG, our offer to carry out the case study following an action-orientated approach helped them in a situation of imminent change paralyzing them. The participants were forced to define their role or the role of their initiative within the specific scenario. Implications of actions (or the lack of them) were discussed allowing the initiative to overcome what looked like a desperate situation. Including external stakeholder in this process led to an exchange of experience and allowed to evaluate the potential for future collaboration. Overall, the motivation of the FÖG members increased as well as their willingness to contribute to the scenario development process.

The individual scenario can represent everything from a desirable to a not desirable future. In the two scenarios in which the FÖG follows pathways which mean a continuation of the initiative, rural vitality, education, outdoor recreation and cultural heritage play an important role. These social beneficial outcomes were partially realized before but hardly actively targeted. In the developed scenarios they are not replacing previous objectives like the preservation of biodiversity but supplementary to the previously targeted ecological outcomes from land management activities. By including socially beneficial outcomes into the declared objectives, initiatives such as the FÖG can adapt to changing social norms. Additional objectives make an initiative attractive to more people. Connecting and collaborating with a variety of regional stakeholder offers the opportunity to build up social capital that can be used to realise the own goals.

We conclude that initiatives like the FÖG facing a difficult situation should open up their mind for possible future pathways instead of seeing future as the prolongation of the present. This includes a reevaluation of objectives and approaches. As the narrow focus on environmental benefits only appeals to a limited amount of people, emphasising social benefits can offer the opportunity to reach out to additional target groups. Without abandoning ecological or

economic objectives the support base can be increased and contribute to the resilience of the initiative.

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