

Traditional Role Problems

Abbreviations

OiB: Odling i Balans

Eider example: the Weidelandschaft Eidertal project

Single letters H, T, J, B refer to the interviewee

2.9.3 Problems with the roles of different stakeholder groups within bottom-up agri-environmental projects

As previously mentioned, a top-down organisational structure has, in the past, been the prevalent organisational structure of agri-environmental projects. With the occurrence of more bottom-up projects within the sector, a major restructuring of the roles of different stakeholder groups within projects has needed to take place (Rammert 2012). However as most stakeholder groups were so accustomed to their traditional roles (in a top-down hierarchy), this has resulted in some problems (Rammert 2012). Rammert (2012) recognises that the new roles of stakeholders need to be clearly defined early on in the project, because the fundamental communication process involved in top-down and bottom-up approaches is so different, that often these new roles are quite different too. Leadership positions previously held by ministries and those in “top” level positions are transferred to regional and local implementation-level stakeholders. There is also the possibility of new roles previously unseen in top-down structured projects, which need to be filled, in bottom-up projects (Rammert 2012). There is however, also evidence for the need to fill some of these “new” roles in top-down systems (Janse & Konijnendijk 2007; Reed 2008).

Thus areas of interest with reference to communication are firstly, role reallocation from traditional roles seen within top-down structured projects to those better suited to bottom-up structured projects. This would result in stakeholder groups fulfilling different roles than they may be used to, which are better suited to the stakeholder group in question and to a



bottom-up structured project. The second area of interest is the need for clear definition of roles, and the responsibilities of different stakeholders (Davies & White 2012; Rammert 2012). The third and final area is the arising of new roles, often previously unfilled or unrecognised, which may add to the success and efficiency of bottom-up projects (Uetake et al. 2013). These are also outlined in the literature as important in traditionally top-down policy examples (Janse 2008) and participation processes (Reed 2008). These “new” roles have been termed within literature encompassing top-down, bottom-up and participatory processes as: “translator” (Rammert 2012), “mediator” (Janse & Konijnendijk 2007; Uetake et al. 2013; Castella et al. 2007), “facilitator” (Davies & White 2012; Janse & Konijnendijk 2007; Welp et al. 2006; Uetake et al. 2013; Benn et al. 2009; Robinson et al. 2006; Reed 2008; McNeil et al. 2006), “intermediary” (Uetake et al. 2013; Harris & Lyon 2013), “co-ordinator” (Uetake et al. 2013; Benn et al. 2009), “knowledge provider” (Uetake et al. 2013) and “knowledge broker” (Janse 2008; Reed 2008; Uetake et al. 2013). All of these previously overlooked or even neglected roles, essentially relate to communication itself. The provision of a representative individual, institution or stakeholder group whose aim is to promote clear, concise and conflict free communication between different stakeholder groups would bridge the gaps between different groups of stakeholders.

These “new” roles, which are not necessarily “new” as such, have however often been overlooked, disregarded, or not been actively fulfilled as roles (that is to say they have not been allocated to a stakeholder group, institution or individual). Recent literature has highlighted these roles as either being left unfulfilled or there being a lack of individuals or organisations within these roles, and therefore the processes that they aim to carry out are being left undone, as communication has not been a top priority.

Rammert (2012) suggests that state agencies and politicians change their roles from control institutions to translators and interpreters, while still maintaining their normal responsibilities, and lend a “helping hand to remove obstacles.” Farmers should become information sources for the region and change from reactive to proactive work and universities should act as advisors as well as continuing to provide new ideas and research.



Janse & Konijnendijk (2007) report in the Neighbourwoods project, scientists held the role of facilitation of public participation processes. Knowledge brokers are not a specific stakeholder group but classed as institutions who translate and distribute relevant research for the specific needs of different stakeholders (Janse 2008).

Providing a bridge between stakeholders, be it through individuals, institutions or websites etc. has been mentioned by Uetake et al. (2013); Hahn et al. (2006); Reed et al. (2009); McNeil et al. (2006); Garcia-Lopez (2013); Harris & Lyon (2013). Individuals undertaking the bridging of a gap are also called “boundary spanners” by Harris & Lyon (2013). The WWF reports the organisation “Odling i Balans” as a bridge between research and practical application (WWF 2010). The need to provide a bridge between different stakeholder groups reflects the gap between stakeholder groups, be it in knowledge and expertise (Uetake et al. 2013), in language (Rammert 2012), general dissimilarities (Reed et al. 2009), professional cultures (Harris & Lyon 2013) or the gap between research and practical application (WWF 2010).

Thus these “new” roles are those fulfilling communicational needs of a project by bridging the gaps between different stakeholders or stakeholder groups.

4.3.4 Traditional role problems

(Super-theme 2. *Partially Professional Cultural Differences*)

The introduction section entitled “Problems with the roles of different stakeholder groups within bottom-up agri-environmental projects” was classified as this theme, with aspects outlined in the introduction forming the codes on which this theme is based. The findings were in support of those outlined in the introduction section as identified from the literature; these are discussed as according to their occurrence in the project examples.

Definition *Traditional roles*: refers to those roles that are typical within a top-down project. For example policy-makers have the roles of the initiators and designers of the project; they



send commands down the chain of command and farmers are the implementers. In bottom-up projects farmers play the role of initiators, designers and implementers of the project. In bottom-up projects the roles of the different stakeholder groups change and this calls for a reallocation and redefinition of roles.

One of the keys in reforming the structure of collaborative projects via better communication processes is the change of the role of participatory stakeholders from those that are traditionally designated to them, to a role better fitted to their skillset or knowledgebase, or alternatively stakeholders taking on a new role, where there is no group already performing a necessary component or process (U. Rammert, 2013, pers. comm.). However traditional roles are very ingrained as they have been implemented for so long, and often stakeholders are unused to the new role in which they have been placed, especially with regard to those in traditionally "top" roles, where the task and role expected from them is very atypical.

Therefore often, even within "bottom-up" projects there are some traditional roles that are implemented, even though there is no need, or niche for them within the project. This causes role problems. *Traditional role problems* are related to the state of relations, and the language barrier and fall partly under the super-theme *professional cultural differences*. This is not however, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the only root-cause of role problems.

Influences: *Traditional role problems* affect the state of the following themes: *inter-stakeholder group relations problems, inter-stakeholder group language barrier, scientific cultural problems and policy and legislation problems*.

Affected by: *Traditional role problems* are influenced by and directly related to the state of the theme *inter-stakeholder group relations problems* and influenced by the themes: *inter-stakeholder group language barrier, policy and legislation problems and scientific cultural problems*.



The condition and processes codes under traditional role problems include all those that fall under inter-stakeholder group relations problems, as well as those unique to this theme.

Traditional role problems in the Examples

Within OiB and Sweden in general H acknowledges that “there are some problems with the roles of different stakeholder groups, however, it is a sensitive topic.” There are, however, ways in which OiB has facilitated better role allocation and reclassification.

As mentioned previously OiB acts as a bridging organisation between different stakeholder groups, translating information, distributing information and working as a mediator between stakeholder groups. OiB is made up of farmers (implementation level) who instigate research to be undertaken, as well as testing ideas. These are all non-traditional roles for implementation-level stakeholders which are carried out by OiB. The final role OiB plays is as a role-model for the LRF youth (The Federation of *Swedish* Farmers youth group), who “are keen to find new and innovative ways to farm.” H also states that “there needs to be a mind-change in the community as to the role of farmers in society, (from their reputation as polluters, to the providers of food and as part of environmental solutions). The public needs to be better informed, and OiB tries to show this on their demonstration farms”.

These new roles were only possible to adopt due to the good relations that OiB built up with its participating stakeholders, and due to the reputation OiB built up and maintains, of remaining independent. Also an important factor of OiB is the identification of mutual interests of the different participants and the provision of mutual benefits; the benefits of the scientific community were already outlined under the theme *scientific cultural problems*.

The benefits provided by OiB to the ministry and farmers union are outlined in the following statement, which also outlines a role change. “The ministry and farmers’ union have new non-traditional roles within OiB, implementing two-way communication. They seek the advice and aid of OiB and send ideas down to OiB.” This is a non-traditional role, as usually implementation level-stakeholders are not consulted for their opinion or advice; it indicates



stakeholders' institutional trust in OiB, and their role as advisors and an important source of information.

The various farming advisory boards in Sweden act as information distribution channels, getting information from OiB to the farming community; they are a part of OiB and provide a way around the complexities of *intra-stakeholder group communication problems* within the farming community. Where ideas coming directly from OiB (without having been first consulted) would be dismissed by other farmers, the "advisory board takes the role of a trusted distributor of knowledge (knowledge broker)."

The perceived role of farmers within society, as held by that of the community, needs to be addressed, and H and T suggest that the media has a role to play here "by reporting positive news and not only negative news (with regards to farmers and farming and the environment)" and that interactive educational games for children may help with this change of mind-set; they specifically mentioned online computer games.

OiB has a well-defined, but flexible structural organisation; the board, as explained by H "has members from many different stakeholder groups, many of whom can make objective decisions even if these do not benefit their specific stakeholder group. They take on new roles specific to OiB...Active stakeholder groups vary dependant on what types of questions are on the agenda at the time. Therefore roles are flexible."

In Latvia it seems that the traditional top-down roles are still prevalent and J puts this down to "relationships between stakeholders and roles of stakeholders are impeded by poor communication; not enough information is available for the farmer. It is hard for a farmer to start an agri-environmental project because there is not enough information and there is so little support." He recognises a need for role changes and states, "there needs to be role redefinition", especially emphasising, "Scientists should not be working entirely in labs; they need to step outside of their comfort zones; everyone should step out of their comfort zones a little."



There has been a role change in the Latvian Farmers' Parliament, with Zanda Kruklite and Maira Dzelzkaleja acting as translators of scientific information.

J believes "in order to redefine roles there needs to be more conferences and symposiums; these need to be international (involving all European countries) and need to be accessible." J compares "green culture" to popular culture and rock concerts. He says that "green culture needs to reach the same level; there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between popular culture and green culture, or green culture should be the popular culture. It needs to reach the community and they need to be included." He essentially states that "green culture" itself should play a larger role in society.

In Latvia, like in Sweden, there is also a problem with the perceived roles of farmers within society, held by the community. J believes that this is due to misrepresentation in the press, and farmers "are not the kind of people to fight the press." He suggests that "to rectify the problem of farmers' reputation, farmers need to be publically open, so that the public can see what happens on the farms, and see the facts in reality. This way people will learn not to trust what they hear or see in the press." But he then adds that "it will raise other issues though trying to get the people to go to the countryside."

In the Eider example, the state agency, for which B worked, took on a non-traditional role; B and her colleague in the field were the representatives for the state agency and they carried out these new roles. As communication and collaboration was a main focus of the project, B (and her colleague) acted as the bridge between the different stakeholder groups, facilitating these aims of communication and collaboration. It can be viewed that the success of the project was in large part, due to B's efficiency as this bridge due to her interdisciplinary background.

B believes that "the traditional roles of different stakeholder groups do have to change, especially within bottom-up initiatives."



Especially of note, was the new role taken on by the Wasser und Boden Verband (WVB). The representative of this organization which was involved in the initiation of the project, acted as a mediator between stakeholder groups; as he was both a farmer and a member of the WVB he worked to represent both, and was well respected and trusted by the different stakeholders. He helped farmers and the community to understand the aims of the project.

B emphasises the importance of bridging the gaps between different stakeholder groups, and believes that more people should be fulfilling the role of “connection as bridges”.

Another role that B performed was that of facilitating the empowerment of the communities and farmers she worked with, through the provision of information and awareness. This is illustrated well by an occasion she described, in which the press was covering the wetland restoration of an area where she worked; she “used her intuition to decide to stay in the background; the community needed to take ownership of the process, their region, their heritage, and their responsibility to take care of their area. As projects end and I have been relocated, the community needed to be empowered to carry it on themselves. The community needed to be proud of what they have achieved.” In this way credit and recognition to the community was provided through press coverage.

Excerpts from:

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