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Fact Sheet

ENVISION: promoting inclusive conservation in protected areas

Case A: Identification of visions for protected area management and quantification of their consequences in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Kromme Rijn (Netherlands)

ENVISION

May 2020

The **ENVISION project** aims to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive conservation approaches and to take part in critical discussions with policy-makers in the lead-up to, and following, the adoption of this global biodiversity conservation framework. Results from the project sites will be shared as “solution” case studies through the PANORAMA – Solutions for a Healthy Planet initiative, showcasing success factors and key elements of advancing the inclusive conservation approach in each of the sites.

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What is inclusive conservation?

- Inclusive conservation is an approach for accommodating and balancing different visions for protected area management and for achieving socially relevant, economically productive, and environmentally sustainable outcomes in protected areas.
- Inclusive conservation has the potential to integrate multiple visions for growth, development, and the conservation of protected areas.
- The approach considers multiple visions for protected area management, assessing the consequences of each vision, collectively defining new visions through social learning, assessing uncertainty and building resilience, acknowledging power relations and rethinking governance, and informing biodiversity and protected area management policy.

The ENVISION project team in the Netherlands mainly focuses on two steps of inclusive conservation highlighted in the figure. We seek to develop an understanding of the ways in which residents and stakeholders envision the landscape to develop, what they care about, know, and do in the landscape, and how they might adapt those visions were they more aware of their outcomes. This will be tested at the case study area in the Netherlands – Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park and Kromme Rijn region. This area presents a cultural peri-urban landscape with many co-existing interests thus high potential for conflicts. Identifying different visions for this landscape and assessing their consequences for biodiversity, provision of ecosystem services and human well-being should help to better understand, and ultimately mitigate, such conflicts.

Assessing the consequences of each vision

Considering multiple visions for protected area management

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2020: planning for the future of biodiversity

According to UN Secretary General António Guterres, 2020 has been named the “Super Year” for biodiversity. Over the course of this year, important multinational decisions were supposed to be made for the future of our planet, one of which would have been the adoption of a new global policy framework for biodiversity, in the context of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dates of the 15th Conference of the Parties are at the moment being decided. The zero draft text of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework has already been presented to the public on January 13th 2020.

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Looking more closely at Europe, when the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen took office in 2019, she placed environment at the top of the European agenda. The COVID-19 outbreak, however, poses a challenge to this momentum, not only because a number of landmark initiatives had to be postponed –including key elements of the EU Green Deal such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy–, but also because the abovementioned development of the global post-2020 biodiversity framework has been further slowed down. From a more hopeful perspective, the COVID-19 crisis can also be an important moment to reflect on the current paradigms and step up the efforts to deal with the existential environmental challenges we face.

Overseas, in the United States, since the country is not party to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), its federal government has not developed biodiversity policy specifically related to the post 2020 Framework. However as a positive action related to biodiversity conservation, with the support of President Donald Trump and 56 bipartisan members of the U.S. Senate, full dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) will be provided. This action will restore the $900 million funding that was proposed for elimination from the budget earlier by the Administration. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is the United States' most important land and water conservation program, responsible for protecting parks, wildlife refuges and recreation areas at the federal, state and local level. Furthermore, the US government continues to play an important role in 2020 in protecting, restoring, and studying biodiversity on public and private lands through the implementation of existing federal conservation laws such as the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The federal government owns about 30 percent of the nation's land, but this land contains only some of the country's most biologically rich areas. The remainder of those areas are situated on private property, state and local government lands. The federal government assists state governments and private landowners through a number of conservation programs that significantly affect biodiversity on private and state owned lands.

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The Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Kromme Rijn (Netherlands)

Case study

To illustrate two steps of the inclusive conservation approach we present the case study of the Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park and Kromme Rijn region, which is a multifunctional landscape centrally located in the Netherlands. The proximity to Utrecht (the country's fourth largest city) makes the area popular for *recreation*.

Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park and Kromme Rijn region

Region: West and North Europe

Ecosystems: Cropland; Orchard; Rangeland / Pasture; Temperate deciduous forest; River; stream; Wetland (swamp, marsh, peatland); Temperate grassland, savanna, shrubland

Governance type:

- "Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park": shared governance
- "Kromme Rijn": managed landscape, which includes several PAs under different management regimes, private land, public land etc.

Challenges: Pollution (incl. eutrophication and litter); Ecosystem loss; Conflicting uses / cumulative impacts

The Kromme Rijn region

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The Kromme Rijn area (219 km^2, 86.090 inhabitants) is a dynamic cultural landscape, shaped by multiple uses. The name refers to a 28 km long river that flows through the area. Different elements of typical Dutch landscapes are present here: varying from mosaics with patched forests to wide open pastures on the river bank. The banks of the stream were a desirable location for 19th century castles and estates. *Fruit cultivation* in both high-stem and modern orchards is an economically important and expanding sector. There are currently 109 farms (1200 ha) producing apples, pears and cherries. The second important agricultural sector is *dairy farming*, which mainly takes place on lower lying grassland areas (reclaimed backswamps). The area has 234 dairy farms (7496 ha), with an unknown area of grassland also used for feed. In the Netherlands, the dairy sector is organized in such a way that most farmers are members of a cooperative, which processes the milk. Other types of agriculture, including cereals (27 ha) and vegetables (1 ha), play a more minor role. Several small nature reserves are interspersed between residential and agricultural areas. One of them is a Natura 2000 area, *ash-coppice and willow-coppice forests*. These types of forests were established for wood production during the Middle Ages.

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Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park

Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park covers 10,000 ha of heathlands, grasslands and floodplains. Some 150,000 years ago, ice and water pushed up masses of earth and stones, forming the Utrecht ridge in the middle of the Netherlands. Today this ridge hosts the second largest forest in the country, made up of oak and beech trees, and provides a view of the river and the Kromme Rijn area. The national park is also home to over 100 bird species. History can be felt everywhere, because of the many estates and castles, but also because of the great military significance that the area has had. The Utrecht ridge has for centuries also been a place for people to relax and rejuvenate. In 2003, more than 30 groups (estate owners, nature conservation organizations, the province of Utrecht, interest groups) joined forces to ensure the recognition, effective protection and development of the natural and cultural-historical values of the Utrecht ridge. As a result, the national park was established.

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Inclusive conservation in action

Process and (anticipated) impacts

The Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park and Kromme Rijn region needs to be multifunctional given the dense surrounding population and many expectations regarding the use of the landscape. However, a growing number of uses are in conflict or competing with each other, and different user interests are not always compatible. Recent examples include high nitrogen deposition levels from agriculture having negative effects on biodiversity. Specifically, the region's Natura 2000 area represents one of 60 Dutch habitats sensitive to nitrogen, and thus is under threat. The second example of current contestations in the region are timber harvests initiated in the National park to foster nature development (for example, creation of a more mixed forest habitat). These harvests have received negative reaction from the public (recreationists and local residents) and raised concerns in wider circles regarding carbon sequestration. Solutions need to be developed with policy embracing new directions of thinking, and society moving from conflict to finding synergetic options to ensure that the area can fulfil each of these, at times conflicting, demands. Better insight in the conflicts and trade-offs is needed to generate new visions for the multifunctionality of the area.

This is where the **ENVISION** project and its **inclusive conservation** approach aims to advance the discussions.

The first step **(1)** of inclusive conservation is to **identify different visions** for the use and development of the landscape. This approach seeks understanding of the ways in which residents and stakeholders envision the landscape to develop, what they care about, know, and do, and how they might adapt those visions were they more aware of their outcomes. In the

Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Kromme Rijn region, this was done through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, recreationists and residents. The interviews were guided using the STREAMLINE format (for more details on the process and results see next page).

In a second step **(2)**, **the consequences of the elicited stakeholders visions** for biodiversity, ecosystem services, and well-being **will be quantified** using spatial optimization and prioritization models. Building on that, deliberative stakeholder workshops in which participants are presented with the various visions and their outcomes (results of the previous steps) will be held. Stakeholders will be invited to deliberate and adjust their visions (or arrive at a shared vision) and the pathways towards them. There are limits to the integration of uses in any given landscape, as compromises may need to be made. However, inclusive conservation is part of the long-term strategy for a more harmonious alignment of different use interests and for the development of shared visions for the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Kromme Rijn region.

STREAMLINE: a new interview format for socio-cultural ecosystem service valuation

Streamline is a new tool for community engagement and participatory research. It is a bespoke scientific interview format that can be tailored to the needs of individual research projects. STREAMLINE is made up of a series of 'canvasses' set in the future: throughout the interview participants are invited to imagine they are stepping into a time-machine, travelling to a year in the future, and envision what their life would ideally be like. In the Dutch study area we used 5 STREAMLINE canvasses in interviews with stakeholders (incl. local residents and recreationists) to explore their perceptions and visions of the area. Specifically, we asked (1) how important are landscape functions to them, (2) which trade-offs they are aware of and, (3) which areas they consider as multi-functional. Example of first canvas **(Figure 1)**.

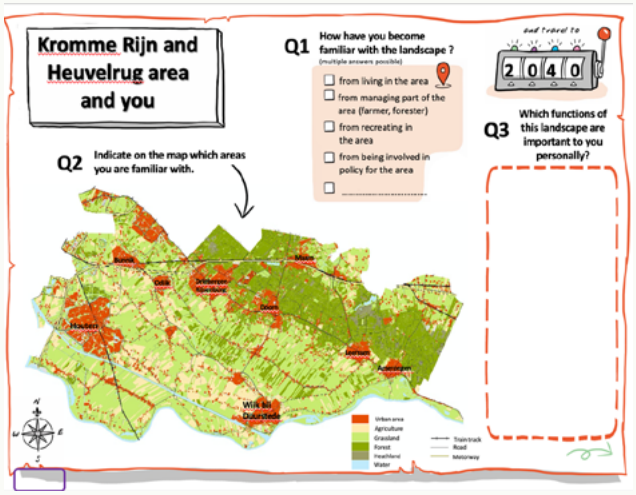

Figure 1: Example of STREAMLINE canvas used in the interviews.

For the majority of the respondents almost all of the 14 landscape functions were considered as important or very important, suggesting that they appreciate the multi-functionality of the region. Using digitized drawings of areas that the participants consider multi-functional we created a map **(Figure 2)**. It shows that the highest number of respondents think of residential and surrounding areas as multi-functional. At the same time a relatively high proportion of respondents have marked most other parts in the landscape as multi-functional as well. Thus, our results confirm that one of the prevailing visions for the area is a multi-functional landscape, which bares high potential for conflicts. Other visions held by stakeholders and residents for the landscape and elicited by the team can be found in Deliverable 2.1. "Visions for protected areas". Follow up steps in the Utrechtse Heuvelrug and Kromme Rijn case study include investigating which trade-offs can be expected from this and other visions.

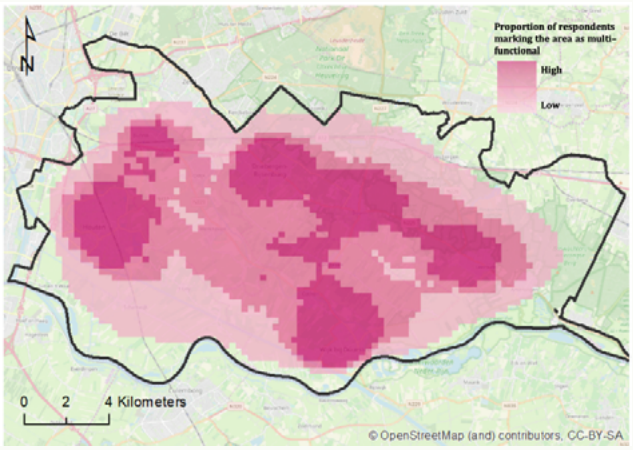

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents who perceive the area to be multi-functional.

ENVISION

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