Fact Sheet

ENVISION: promoting inclusive conservation in protected areas

From a shared understanding of problems and solutions toward resilient landscape strategies for Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve and its surrounding cultural landscape in Mjölby Municipality (Sweden).

June 2020
The **ENVISION project** aims to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive conservation approaches and to take part in critical discussions with stakeholders and 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.
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.

Together with local actors, the ENVISION project team will develop a participatory process for building a shared understanding of landscape management challenges. Based on this, we will jointly explore what may constitute strategies towards solutions, how an awareness of uncertainties may influence implementation, and ways to adapt when new challenges emerge. The ENVISION approach will be tested at the case study area in Sweden – Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve and its surrounding cultural landscape in Mjölby Municipality. The area presents a mosaic of forests and fields with numerous edges and boundaries where coexisting interests may clash, governance is fragmented and landscape degradation lurks. A collaborative process should strengthen the capacity to deal with conflicts, uncertainties and future needs.
The European Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 will “bring back nature into our lives”

On the 20th of May, after several delays due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission finally unveiled the long-awaited EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The strategy “aims to put Europe’s biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 with benefits for people, the climate and the planet”, and it is also the chance for Europe to establish itself as an ambitious leader on the global arena during the preparations for the future Global Biodiversity Framework. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 has the potential to be revolutionary, and it is crucial that Member States will commit and show ambition at national level.

The strategy calls for “at least 30% of the land and 30% of the sea to be protected in the EU” (an increase in protected area of 4% for land and 19% for seas areas compared to today). Moreover, another important key commitment is that at least 1/3 of EU’s protected areas, including EU primary and old-growth forests, should fall into the category of “strictly protected”. Finally -and very importantly- the Strategy commits to effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately. For the implementation of these commitments, the European Commission recognises in the conclusion the need to “ensure social justice, fairness and inclusiveness” during the member states implementation process, which is a crucial principle when it comes to the effective management of protected areas.
Furthermore, the Strategy states that "an inclusive approach with the participation of all stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society, local authorities, the private sector, academia and scientific institutions" should be guaranteed in the upcoming Global Biodiversity Framework.

In the context of the post-COVID-19 recovery, the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 is considered a key component of the European recovery plan, as it is a vital tool to restore a healthy and mutually beneficial human-nature relationship.

The United States is not party to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). Consequently, its federal government has not developed biodiversity policy specifically related to the post 2020 Framework. Nevertheless, other positive actions to protect biodiversity are ongoing. For example, funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) will be provided to purchase lands and waters and to fund conservation programs. This funding is supported by President Donald Trump and 56 bipartisan members of the U.S. Senate. The LWCF 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 lands. The remaining 70% is private property, state and local government lands. The federal government assists state governments and private landowners through a number of conservation programs that significantly enhances and protects biodiversity on those lands and waters.

In both the United States and Europe, there is an ongoing need for more inclusive approaches to the conservation of protected areas taking into account place-based differences in values, concerns and preferences for landscape management, as well as changing circumstances and emerging new challenges. In the following section, we show how inclusive conservation is being applied to the case of Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve and Mjölby's mosaic landscape, Sweden.
Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve and its surrounding cultural landscape in Mjölby Municipality presents an excellent case study highlighting the importance of boundaries – in the biophysical landscape as well as in its governance and use – for landscape multifunctionality and capacity to deal with changes. The study area also offers unique Northern Europe oak wood-pastures where the future connects with the past, in the heart of Östergötland in the south-east of Sweden.

Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve, Mjölby Municipality, Sweden

Region: Northern Europe

Ecosystems: Temperate deciduous forest, temperate grasslands. Dominating habitats in Western taiga (with high content of birch and aspen) and Fennoscandian wooded pastures (with large oaks)

Governance type:
- “Mjölby Municipality”: managed landscape, which includes ten nature reserves, private land, public land etc.
- “Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve”: shared governance.

Challenges: Wildlife pests, Climate risks, Land abandonment / afforestation, Conflicting uses / cumulative impacts
Mjölby Municipality

Mjölby Municipality (557.3 km²; 27,758 inhabitants) is characterized by a mixed multifunctional landscape with a gradient from agricultural fields to dense forests. Farming, with a focus on dairy and potatoes, and forestry, focusing on pine and spruce species, are important sectors driving the local economy. Over the course of millennia, the interacting forces of nature and people have shaped this area into a landscape mosaic that embeds high ecological and cultural values, and offers excellent conditions for recreation. Cultural heritage sites are abundant, with historical treasures including burial sites from the Stone Age, runestones from the Viking era and castle ruins from the middle ages. The numerous forest patches and edges sustain a high biodiversity and make the area ideal for hunting. The County of Östergötland, in which Mjölby Municipality is located, has a long tradition of integrated landscape management. The County Administrative Board recently developed a green infrastructure strategy that seeks sustainable multi-objective use of oak woodlands (the area supports a part of one of Northern Europe’s largest contiguous oak woodlands). The strategy forefronts good collaboration between land owners, users, state agencies and other actors, effective cross-sectoral governance and ecological integrity. The aim is to implement the strategy through a mix of commercial oak forestry practices, voluntary set-aside, nature reserves, habitat protection areas, and nature conservation agreements.
Västra Harg's Lövskogar nature reserve

Västra Harg's Lövskogar nature reserve is one of Mjölby's ten nature reserves and situated in the middle of the transition from an agricultural landscape to an area largely covered by forests. Named after its bordering village Västra Harg, the reserve is a 345-hectare mosaic of deciduous forests, pastures, meadows, lakes and wetlands. Visitors can enjoy hiking trails, excellent bird watching, cross-country skiing, as well as swimming and fishing in the adjacent lakes. Large parts of what are now rich deciduous forests have previously been used as hay meadows and pastures. The remaining grasslands are mowed, or grazed by cattle and sheep from a neighbouring farm, keeping the fields open and preserving the unique diversity of traditional grassland species. The high biodiversity value of the forests is mainly linked to aspen and oaks, the numerous old trees and abundant dead wood, and the many forest edges. The ancient meadows and woodlands of Västra Harg offer visitors a unique glimpse of what the landscape might have looked like in the past. The nature reserve, therefore, is not only a biodiversity hotspot of the region’s green infrastructure but also a source of inspiration and a reference site for nature conservation practices elsewhere.
Västra Hargs Lövskogar nature reserve and its surrounding mosaic landscape are defined by more or less conspicuous edges and boundaries that simultaneously separate and connect different parts of the landscape. This diversity is a source both of great richness as well as of tensions and conflict between coexisting interests and values. The inherently shared governance of the landscape, with many stakeholders and decentralised decision making, faces a number of correlated challenges: the oak woodlands in the area are slowly degrading while the old pastures face afforestation, climate change is increasing risks of droughts and wildfires, nuisance species such as the spruce bark beetle and wild boars (causing problems not least for forestry and agriculture) give rise to conflicts over land management, while economic interests in forestry and agriculture diverge from recreational interests and long-term biodiversity conservation targets.

Boundaries, physical as well as between sectors or within administrations, and boundary dynamics present a fundamental challenge for designing landscape strategies for accommodating plural interests and values. This is even more pronounced in times of unprecedented changes, when management strategies need not only to deal with the current situation but also to be flexible and resilient enough to navigate novel circumstances. Inclusive conservation needs to foster new engagement approaches and dialogues to strengthen the collective capacity to deal with conflicts, uncertainties and future needs to change and adapt.

This is where the ENVISION project and its inclusive conservation approach can contribute with new concepts, frameworks and forms of collaboration. Researchers within the ENVISION team are developing a new framework and principles for guiding resilience practice in resonance with changing uncertainties in dynamic multi-functional landscapes.
Central to our work is **knowledge** and **understanding**, and through it, **agency**. Drawing on a combination of three types of knowledge - **system knowledge** (i.e. landscape components, drivers of change, functional processes and interrelated dynamics), **target knowledge** (awareness of other stakeholders’ subjective perceptions, goals and aspirations) and **transformative or operational knowledge** (feasible solutions, knowledge about mandates and roles of other actors, and process skills) - researchers together with local/ regional stakeholders will investigate resilient landscape strategies for the landscape mosaic in and around Västra Harg. These strategies include alternative pathways to the same outcome, to enable swift adaptation when circumstances change.

The above described approach includes a shared baseline understanding of knowledges and potentially diverging values of stakeholders and local residents gained during a first step of analyses using 30 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and a Public Participation GIS (PPGIS) survey sent to 1200 property owners (25% response rate) in Mjölby municipality in 2019. The PPGIS survey examined the relationship between perceived threats and preferences for landscape management, self-reported knowledge on environmental issues and landscape values. This was done through an online mapping exercise, where respondents were asked to pinpoint locations in the landscape they consider valuable for instrumental, intrinsic, and relational reasons (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Landscape values in Mjölby municipality resulting from a Participatory GIS survey. The spatial maps depict the occurrence and density of three major value types in the landscape: **instrumental**, relating to human use; **intrinsic**, referring to the inherent value of nature and the landscape, and **relational**, deriving from people’s relationships with the landscape and each other.
These point locations were collected to visualize hotspots of values in Mjölby municipality. Key findings are the broad geographic distribution of instrumental values and the high degree of overlap occurring between relational and intrinsic values in towns and Natura 2000 sites (Figure 1). The latter implies that residents in Mjölby municipality define their well-being partially in terms of the existence of these intrinsically valuable places. The geographical overlap between multiple different values presents a clear need for unpacking what these values mean for landscape governance. Multiple values can both reinforce each other and at the same time lead to value-based conflicts that need to be managed. Collaboratively unpacking the knowledges and values around landscape challenges and solutions is therefore central to our inclusive conservation approach in the Swedish case study.
ENVISION is a 3-year research project funded through the 2017-2018 Belmont Forum and BiodivERsA joint call under the BiodivScen ERA-Net COFUND programme.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4304053

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