

Perspectives for landscape management by farmers in the framework of regional branding processes

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Abstract: *Agriculture seems to have an effect on regional identity, especially through the landscape. In the context of globalization and the involved threat of sameness, regional identity is becoming more important and people show a greater need for places with an identity they can connect to. This need is reflected in regional branding as a new way towards regional development. In an ideal scenario, agriculture could benefit from regional branding processes and contribute to them, bringing the process to a higher level. In this paper the perspectives are investigated for landscape management by farmers in the framework of regional branding processes. This is done on the basis of interviews with farmers and organizations/governments involved in regional branding. The research shows that both farmers and local organizations or governments are open to the idea of landscape management by local farmers, but a number of obstacles should still be overcome for this to become common practice. Better communication and cooperation with farmers and among local organizations is a key to success.*

Keywords: *Regional branding, landscape management, multifunctional agriculture*

Regional identities

With increasing globalization, mobility and possibilities for telecommunication, society is confronted with more complex and variable social structures. On the other hand, however, an increasing uniformity can be observed, and the rise of so-called ‘non-places’ such as shopping malls or fastfood chains. As a result of these processes, personal identity has become unstable, because it is increasingly determined by transitory consumption patterns and endless lists of possibilities. As a reaction to the process of globalisation and its consequences, a countermovement developed called localization. It seems that there is a growing need of individuals, daily operating in a globally organized network society, for local and regional places with an identity they feel a bond with (Castells, 1997).

Local identity involves first of all the characteristic traits of an area which distinguish it from other areas, and is more than the history of an area, its tradition or folklore. However, at the same time the local people attach a meaning to these characteristics and develop an attachment to their region (Kruit et al., 2004). In this way, local identity could be seen as a social structure and one region can have more than one identity (Paasi, 2003).

The increasing importance of identity is reflected in the spectrum of political regional branding attempts, in the ways in which several kind of actors try to integrate identity in the marketing of their products, but also in research (Kruit et al., 2004; Simon, 2005). Regional branding is defined by Hegger (2007, p. 12) as a process making use of local resources “to preserve and strengthen a region’s identity and create synergy and coherence between economic activities and land-uses at regional level”. This can lead to increased possibilities for tourism, since successful tourist destinations exhibit goods and services that distinguish the destination from other destinations (Sims, 2009). Two types of branding processes can be distinguished: initiatives with a focus on typical regional products, like Parmigiano-Reggiano (Italy) or Beaufort cheese (France), and initiatives with a focus on the region itself, like Eifel (Germany) and West Cork (Ireland) (de Bruin, 2008). Both types of branding are increasingly used in rural areas, where they emerge as a new approach to rural development (Hegger, 2007).

An important element of the identity of a region, which often gets a lot of attention in regional branding attempts, is the landscape. A sector which has always had a large influence on the landscape is agriculture. In the EU, agriculture manages about 50% of the land, and agricultural buildings are often cultural heritage. Through its influence on the landscape, agriculture contributes considerably to the identity of regions and can therefore play a role in regional branding processes. This paper explores the perspectives for landscape management by farmers in regional branding processes. It is based on results obtained through the Belgian MUSICAL1 project, which investigates the potential of multifunctionality and local identity as new paradigms for a competitive and sustainable agriculture. A literature review on agriculture, regional branding and the landscape is followed by a description of the theoretical framework and the methodology used. In the results section, the paper first focuses on the role agriculture can play in regional branding processes through its effect on the landscape, and then sheds some light on how this role is evaluated by farmers themselves and organizations involved in the branding process. It also looks at ways to involve farmers in regional branding processes so that both agriculture and the region as a whole can profit from it. The paper finally ends with some conclusions and policy recommendations on how to achieve an increased sustainability in landscape management, local development of agriculture and rural areas.

Agriculture and landscape as a part of regional identity

Differences in soil types, climatic conditions, history and culture, policies and the proximity of input and output markets in a region have, over the ages, led to substantial differences in the agriculture of a region (Van Hecke, 1976; Van Hecke, 1995). Not only is there a difference in farm types, going from specialized arable over mixed farms to specialized livestock farms, there are also differences in the intensiveness of production and the degree in which new technologies are applied. Over time, these regional differences in agricultural systems have contributed to the creation of typical landscapes, typical fauna and flora in a region, diversity in agricultural products, traditions and cultural elements. Evidence exists that when agriculture would disappear in a region, there would be a negative impact on landscapes and agri-ecological systems (MacDonald et al., 2000).

The positive influence of agriculture on the different aspects of regional identity can benefit several actors in the rural area, like the real estate and tourism sector. Research by van Dam et al. (2002) showed that people associate the countryside mostly with morphological and visual aspects, such as green, farms, meadows and cows. These aspects also proved to be among the most important motives for living in the countryside. Research on landscape preferences showed that the openness of landscapes, which can mostly be attributed to agriculture, is a significant predictor of their overall attractiveness (Rogge et al., 2007). Therefore it is not surprising that certain aspects of – multifunctional- agriculture increase the value of residential property in an area (Garrod and Willis, 1992, Cheshire and Sheppard, 1995, Irwin, 2002, ...), but also the prices of rural accommodation (Vanslebrouck et al., 2005, Fleisher and Tschetnik, 2005). It should however also be noted that agriculture can have a negative effect on landscapes as well. In the specific case of Flanders, for example, farmers contribute to the so called “mess-ification” of the landscape, because they use all kinds of materials to fix things or build new, small spaces on their farm. Farms are therefore often disorderly from an architectural point of view. This has to do with money, but also with mentality. Neatness, however, or the feeling that the agricultural environment is well managed is one of the most important factors in a positive landscape perception (Antrop et al., 2006).

The effect of agriculture on regional identity and the economic effects this can have in a region, for example on tourism, are very clear in some Italian regions, like Tuscany, or the Provence in France. With the change of the rural area from a productive to a consumptive area (Potter and Tilzey, 2005), the relationship between agriculture and tourism is also changing. The image people have from landscapes has changed from a functional image to a more hedonistic one. Buijs et al. (2006, p. 386)

¹ Multifunctionality and Local Identity as Paradigms for a Sustainable and Competitive Agriculture, financed by the Belgian Federal Science Policy, 2007-2010

formulate it as follows: “Where formerly the hiker hiked through the farm landscape, nowadays the farmer farms in the leisure landscape”. To avoid conflicts about the use of space and landscape preferences, consultation and public debate are necessary (Buijs et al., 2006).

It is however not only the landscape preferences which are changing, the landscape itself is also subject to several changes. As the result of a continuous interaction between natural processes and human activities, the landscape in large parts of Europe is changing. Because of urbanization and increasing individual mobility, regional differences between landscapes are gradually disappearing. On the one side, the landscape becomes more diverse, for example in architecture and infrastructure, but on the other side there are less differences between regions (Antrop et al., 2006). Agriculture plays a role in this, but also has the potential to turn the situation around.

Theoretical framework: Towards a more sustainable and competitive agriculture

As a result of the previously mentioned phenomenon of globalization, but also technological developments and social migration, regional differences in agriculture are disappearing, which causes typical elements of local farming systems to gradually fade away. As such, agriculture contributes significantly to the uniformization of landscapes and regional identity. According to Dramstad et al. (2001) there are indications of a linear linkage between the degree of heterogeneity of a farmed landscape and the number of cultural heritage monuments, the degree of biodiversity and human appreciation. A certain degree of heterogeneity in the agricultural landscape should therefore be encouraged. Conservation of typical local farming systems is also useful to protect local knowledge and information from getting lost. According to Calvo-Iglesias et al. (2006), farmers are the gate keepers of information on land-use, landscape dynamics and local cultural heritage, that may not easily be collected from other sources. Daugstad et al. (2006) also mention several studies proving that active farming and cultural heritage are positively linked. Further there are indications that coupling the production of collective goods, like landscapes, to agricultural production is from economic point of view the best strategy (Vatn et al., 2002).

Next to a uniformization of landscapes and regional identity, modernization of agriculture also led to other negative effects. Although governments are taking measures to prevent this, agriculture is one of the main polluters of the environment and is responsible for the degradation of several nature values. On top of this, the modernization process is confronted with market limits: resistance is growing from countries outside Europe, who consider the production incentives that caused the European Union (EU) to become a net exporter of food, as unfair competition. There are also social limits: farmers become victims of isolation and income decreases, there are increased financial risks and more recently agriculture has suffered a lot from food and animal health crises. All these conflicts show that the modern agricultural model is in crisis and needs to be changed.

A new unifying paradigm that can bring post-modern agriculture in accordance with new societal demands, and as such contributes to increasing its ecological, social and economic sustainability, is multifunctionality (Van Huylenbroeck, 2007). Multifunctional agriculture goes further than food production and contributes also to environment, nature, water management, protection of cultural heritage, landscapes, etc. Agriculture has always been multifunctional, but the other functions next to food production have been neglected in the modernization process. In the multifunctionality paradigm, these functions again get increased importance, but taking them up doesn't necessarily lead to a decrease in incomes and competitiveness of agriculture. One way to combine multifunctionality with competitiveness is through agriculture's contribution to regional identity. This idea is schematically depicted in Fig. 1. The agricultural identity of a region can have positive economic effects, because it can increase the attractiveness of the region for tourists, (new) inhabitants or investors. An attractive agrarian-regional identity can therefore increase the competitiveness of rural areas. In an ideal situation, multifunctional agriculture could also profit from this, e.g. through increased opportunities for diversification. As such, the circle is closed and all rural stakeholders can strengthen each other, leading to a positive upward movement in the development of a region.

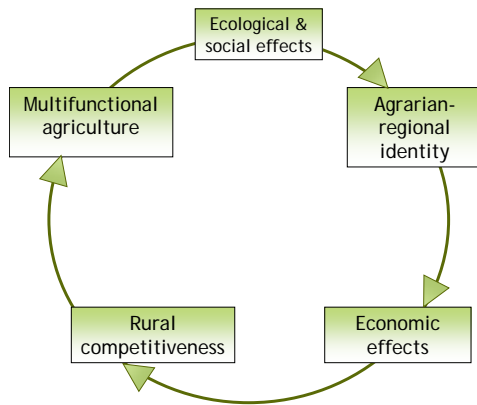


Figure 1. The circle of rural competitiveness.

Through its influence on identity, multifunctional agriculture can influence regional branding processes, but can also be influenced by them. Agriculture can be remunerated by local governments or organizations for their contribution to the landscape, or private financing mechanisms can be constructed in the branding process, like landscape auctions, landscape funds, etc. Although there are also negative aspects to these private financing mechanisms, they do lead to a higher involvement of local people with the region, its landscape and local agriculture (Kuhlman and de Graaff, 2009). On the other hand, farmers can also profit from an attractive regional identity through farm tourism, recreation, on-farm selling or processing of agricultural products. According to Donkers et al. (2006) such a regional chain, delivering high quality products and a contribution to environment, nature and landscape, can survive without lasting subsidies. During the setting up phase, however, support from the government or other instances is necessary. The type of multifunctional agriculture which is described here, corresponds with the principle of ecological entrepreneurship, described by Marsden and Smith (2005), and defined as: actors which are committed to preserve cultural, ecological, environmental integrity, and which find pragmatic ways to create economic benefits in a local community, based on networks.

In the next section, the methodology is described, used to answer the three research questions: which role does agriculture play in landscape management in the framework of regional branding processes, how is this role evaluated by farmers and non-farmers, and how to better involve farmers in these processes.

Methodology

The explorative character of the research, and the type of research questions, ask for a qualitative approach. Because the aim of the research is rather to find new information than to test an already existing theory, the method of grounded theory proved to be a good basis to construct the methodology. Grounded theory involves a consequential induction from empirically collected data in order to build theoretical frameworks. Several traditions exist in the method of grounded theory, which have a slightly different opinion on the use of external sources other than empirical data and on the use of a systematic research process of coding (Devillé, 2008). This research has adopted a more moderate tradition of grounded theory by integrating a substantial body of literature.

In grounded theory, empirical data are creatively coded into general categories and subcategories, which are then related and abstracted into central concepts which form the basis for a theoretical framework. Coding is the process by which parts of the empirical data, mainly paragraphs of interview's verbatim transcripts, are labelled with a well considered name. Creativity and careful interpretation of the data during this process are a prerequisite for the quality of the results. This inductive method for building theory involves a close interconnection between data collection and

data analysis, which should happen simultaneously and whereby the theory should explain most parts of the process studied.

Case studies

In this study, the empirical data were collected in a set of carefully but consciously chosen theoretical cases: a collective case study. Choosing several cases increases scientific credibility and transferability of the results, since this is a kind of data-triangulation. From this point of view 4 regions in Belgium were chosen as study areas: Meetjesland and Haspengouw in Flanders, and Parc Naturel des Deux Ourthes (PN2O) and the Gaume in the Walloon region. They have been consciously selected based on initial findings in literature and explorative discussions with experts in this domain. The criteria used to select these cases can be divided into three main categories:

- 1) *Characteristics related to the identity of the region*: whether the region has unique selling points, the historical background of the region, whether the region has typical agricultural products and whether there is a unity in characteristics in the region;
- 2) *Characteristics related to how this identity is perceived*: whether the residents are aware of their region, the image the region has to outsiders;
- 3) *Characteristics related to regional development*: the presence of regional development organizations in the region, vital coalitions between actors in the regions, how the regional development process is organized, the goal of the regional development process and possible problems encountered in reaching this goal.

The four selected cases are interesting for our research objectives, since they are all active in regional development and branding, but very different with respect to the aforementioned criteria. In Fig. 2, the cases are situated.

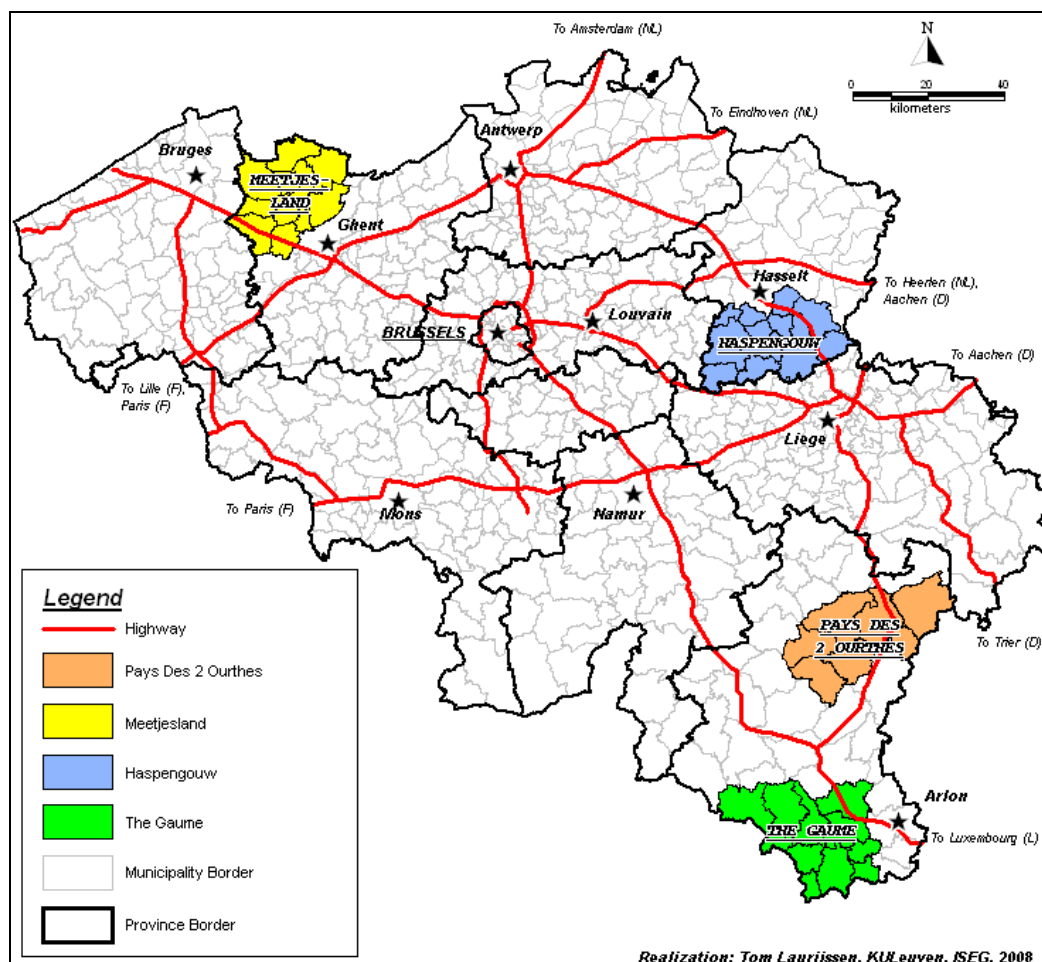


Figure 2. Location of case studies within Belgium.

In order to clearly understand the results of each work package related to the case studies it is good to have some understanding of what typifies the different regions. Table 1 gives an overview of some important characteristics and shows that there are two main differences between the Flemish and Walloon study areas: the Walloon areas have a smaller population and a much lower population density than the Flemish areas; the number of farms is a lot greater in the Flemish areas, especially when compared with the size of the area, but they are smaller than in the Walloon areas.

Table 1. General characteristics of the study areas.

	Meetjesland	Haspengouw	PN2O	Gaume	Belgium
area (in km ²)	646.3	672.8	760.6	771.2	30527
grassland and arable land (cadastre, in km ² , 2007)	464.7	397.2	322.8	271.6	16263.5
% grassland and arable land (cadastre, 2007)	71.9	59.0	42.4	35.2	53.3
population (2007)	164039	199607	21798	50867	10584534
population density (inhab/km ²) (2007)	253.81	296.68	28.66	65.96	346.72
# farms (2006)	2342	2094	568	439	60736
# farms per km ²	3.6	3.1	0.7	0.6	2.0
ha arable and grassland per farm	19.8	18.9	56.8	61.9	26.7

Data collection and analysis

The empirical data needed to answer the research questions were collected through semi-structured interviews with two groups of people: farmers already involved in multifunctional agriculture², and people from local governments or organizations directly or indirectly involved in the regional branding process³. These organizations focus on different aspects of regional development such as nature, the landscape, tourism and recreation, heritage, agriculture or regional development in general. People involved in LEADER were also interviewed. The interviews, done in January till April of 2008, were semi-structured, which means that a rough outline was made before, but the direction in which the interview was going was finally determined by the respondent's answers.

To collect the data, the method of purposeful sampling was used, which involves searching for information-rich data (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Respondents or data are selected in a way which maximizes learning possibilities concerning the research questions. Sample size is determined by the need to involve as many experiences as possible and saturation occurs when no new themes emerge. Specific attention has to be paid to atypical cases. With this in mind, the interviewees were selected through Google search (with the name of the regions as the main keywords) and snowball sampling. Candidates were contacted through e-mail and/or a phone call in which the research objectives were roughly explained, and the broad topics of the interviews and the time requirement were mentioned. On average, an interview took 2 hours. After 62 interviews, no additional information could be obtained. The number of interviews in the four cases is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of interviewees in the four cases.

	Meetjesland	Haspengouw	PN2O	Gaume	Total
Farmers	6	6	6	6	24
Organizations/governments	8	7	11	12	38
Total	14	13	17	18	62

The topics of the interviews with people of organizations and governments were their contacts to farmers, why do or don't they have contact with them, are there local initiatives by farmers and are they stimulated, their opinion on multifunctional agriculture, etc. For farmers, the topics were the motivation for becoming multifunctional, the problems they encounter, their link with the region,

² We chose to work with farmers already involved in multifunctional agriculture, so that the interview could focus more on landscape management in the framework of regional branding and not multifunctional agriculture in general.

³ This group of local organizations and governments will sometimes be called in short 'organizations'.

their contacts with organizations in the region, their attitude towards regional branding processes, etc.

After a verbatim transcription of all interviews, they were analyzed through hierarchical coding in Nvivo. A hierarchy of concepts and nodes was constructed through the circular methodological cycle, which means that in the coding process you are always going back to the previous step and then forth again (Chicchi, F., 2000, cited in: Dessein and Nevens, 2007). In the next section, the results are described.

Results

Landscape management is an important aspect of regional branding processes. In this results section, the role agriculture can play in this is further elaborated on the basis of the interviews done in the four Belgian cases. A descriptive part is followed by an evaluation of farmers as landscape managers by organizations and governments involved in regional branding and by farmers themselves. Finally, the interviews provided some insight in how to better involve farmers in landscape management in the framework of regional branding.

Role of agriculture in landscape management in the framework of regional branding

Farmers' contribution to the landscape, and hence regional identity, can be categorized in four ways: on the basis of the type of influence, positive or negative, on the basis of intentionality, intentional or unintentional, on the basis of initiative, on the farmer's own initiative or stimulated by someone else, and on the basis of type of involvement, practical management of the landscape or involvement in the decision-making process on landscape management.

In the four cases, agricultural land occupies 35 to 72% of the open space. Connected to this use of space, there is a specific ecosystem with matching fauna and flora. Especially in the Flemish cases, agriculture's influence on the landscape is therefore very important, although in the Walloon cases it is also considerable. 37% of the organizations/governments interviewed and 30% of the farmers mentioned this unintentional contribution of farmers to the landscape in the interviews.

Farmers can also intentionally influence the landscape, by maintaining small landscape elements, removing garbage, etc. Five farmers mentioned they take care of their old farm buildings, pools for the cattle, old machinery, etc. which can have an impact on the landscape as well. Some of the farmers interviewed deliberately use only traditional building materials when renovating their farm buildings, in order to conserve cultural heritage and better fit the farm in the landscape. One farmer in Haspengouw even created on his own initiative a footpath connecting two roads.

Some things I do on a voluntary basis. This little parcel where the spring rises and where we installed the path, we provide this for free. Only because it feels good, that people go walking there, a dog goes to drink from the spring in the summer months... (farmer Haspengouw)

Farmers, however, don't always take the initiative themselves. Organizations often approach farmers for help with embellishing the region. This is mentioned by 26% of the organizations and 8% of the farmers interviewed. Activities mentioned were the planting of flowers or hedges to improve the quality of walking or bicycle routes, planting standard fruit trees, protecting brooklets, etc. Farmers are also sometimes asked to let their animals graze in nature reserves or on roadsides, dikes, etc...

The project "Life Otters" is in cooperation with farmers. We propose them to put barriers to protect the brooklets on their pastures, provide watering places, etc. (organization PN20)

Besides positive effects, farmers can also influence the landscape in a negative way. 21% of the organizations and 13% of the farmers mentioned this, which is clearly less than for the positive effects. Negative effects can be caused by farm buildings which don't fit in the landscape because of their architecture, the colour of the buildings or their size. There were also complaints that large industrial-type farms destroy the landscape by removing trees or dikes to facilitate tillage and cultivation. Then there is the problem of untidy, neglected farm yards or fields, giving the landscape a

disordered look. Finally, because of a lack of measures against erosion, soil from the fields can make roads dirty and unattractive for tourists and recreants.

The scaling-up of agriculture means that farms are becoming bigger, and if I see some of them appearing in the landscape, those are boxes, serious boxes, you know. I don't always like them, those big white boxes, plumped down in the landscape. (organization Meetjesland)

Farmers' influence however is not restricted to practical aspects, they can also be involved in the decision-making processes on regional branding and landscape management through membership of municipal socio-cultural and touristic boards, local commissions on rural development, the general assembly of regional organizations, or in a more informal way. (mentioned by 25% of the farmers and 29% of the organizations).

The effect farmers can have on the landscape is clear now. But what do local organizations involved in regional branding think about involving farmers in this. Why would they do this or why not? And how do farmers think about managing the landscape in the framework of regional branding processes. Why would they like to participate in this or why not? The following sections answer these questions.

Evaluation of farmers as landscape managers in regional branding: by organizations

From the interviews, reasons can be derived why organizations and local governments want an active role of farmers in regional branding, and why not.

Reasons for involving farmers

The reasons to involve farmers in landscape management in the framework of regional branding processes can be categorized into four categories: opportunistic reasons, moral reasons, pragmatic reasons and social reasons. They were mentioned by respectively 50, 37, 37 and 13% of the organizations.

Opportunistic reasons for involving farmers in the regional branding process all have something to do with making this process run more smoothly, with better results and at a lower cost. Organizations say to involve farmers to obtain a higher acceptance of regional branding. These processes often cause resistance from the farmer population because they fear unfavourable developments and they don't understand why money should be spent on this (money from the second pillar of the CAP, for example, which used to go strictly to 'hardcore' farming). When farmers are involved, and can maybe make some money out of it, they appear to be much more tolerant towards the evolutions in their region. Organizations also claim that regional branding only works if everybody in the region participates, because only then the region as a whole can be made more attractive. Another reason which fits within this category is that working with farmers for landscape management is cheaper, and they can do tasks which are difficult or unpleasant for people of the regional organizations.

We have had sunken roads of which the municipalities really didn't know how to manage them. "We trim them, but we can't keep track." ... Then we had to find a solution to manage them which could be continued in a sustainable way. Then we decided to cooperate with an organization of farmers doing landscape management. (organization Haspengouw)

The second category of reasons for the involvement of farmers in the regional development process are more of a moral nature. By involving farmers in landscape management, some organizations believe they become more aware of nature and increase their knowledge on this topic. The objective of the organizations can also be to counter the negative effects of farming, e.g. to prevent erosion (which can soil walking and biking routes), to better integrate farm buildings in the landscape, to prevent a too industrialized way of farming, etc. Another reason to involve farmers is to keep agriculture viable in the region. Some organizations are afraid of negative consequences if agriculture would disappear in their region. Agriculture can, for example, be a partner in the struggle against industrialization or urbanization of the region. They fear a growing pressure on open space in the region, which would be harmful for regional development.

In earlier days, the municipalities often had an 'edges person' mowing the road edges and it was often a farmer. It is time for farmers to stand on their dignity, to become proud of the landscape, that they don't stick only to their arable land but go further and take care of their whole environment. (organization Haspengouw)

Organizations want to involve farmers in regional branding because of practical reasons as well. Farmers have a large potential to act as landscape managers, because they already manage a large part of the land. Moreover, they are often rooted in the region and work closely to the land, which provides them with a lot of knowledge. They can also be a source of new ideas on regional branding.

You can't escape it. 70% of the region's surface is agricultural land. That's a lot... then we as a landscape organization would have to be very stupid not to consider this as very important in the development of the landscape, its quality... For us it's crucial in the development of the region, because it has a huge potential for developing the landscape. (organization Meetjesland)

Finally, organizations may want to involve farmers in the regional branding process because of social reasons. Involving farmers in the practical implementation of regional branding can be done to increase local employment and therefore to keep money within the region. Farmers nowadays are often seen as a nuisance in the countryside, because they would pollute the environment, cause noise or odour, disturb traffic, etc. Involving farmers in nature and landscape management, and making this role visible to other people, can create more appreciation for local farmers.

Reasons for not involving farmers

18% of the organizations don't want to involve farmers, or believe it is difficult to involve them, because of problems related to the local farmers. Arguments are that farmers already get a lot of incentives and support, and that they should try harder to benefit from existing channels. This requires of course some creativity. One organization also claimed that a nice landscape doesn't necessarily come from farmers: a well-managed industrial zone can be as well integrated in the landscape as a farm. Another organization said that farmers should do more for the landscape on their own initiative, without expecting always something in return. In Zeeland Flanders, for example, farmers would take better care of the integration of their farm in the landscape, without subsidies. One organization finally, believes that it's difficult to integrate agriculture in regional branding because the agriculture in the region is so diverse that different policies would be necessary, causing high costs.

The landscape in the north of Meetjesland is similar to that in Zeeland Flanders, but there the farms look much better cared-for. The people there do this without subsidies. In Flanders, this is more difficult, maybe the two regions are incomparable. People here need to be stimulated to renovate farms, to better fit them into the landscape, to do planting on their farmyard. Even for educational projects, people construct hideous farms (organization Meetjesland).

16% of the organizations believe farmers don't have the time or the capacities to be involved in landscape management and 13% of the organizations say they themselves don't have enough time or financial means to organize participation of farmers in regional branding. One specific problem which was mentioned was that the more people you involve in local decision-making, the longer it takes before you reach a consensus.

The inconvenience is that taking decisions becomes more difficult, because inevitably, the more people there are, the more the opinions are divided... If they reach a consensus, everybody agrees. But if this is not the case, it will take a lot of time, it becomes tiring, and sometimes it brings back old disputes or difficulties... (organization PN20)

11% of the organizations believe it's not profitable to involve farmers in regional branding. One organization, which is organizing landscape management by farmers, says it is very costly to do this because they can't work with a fixed group of farmers. A nature organization wanting to involve farmers in the management of nature reserves believes this is costly because of certain lease regulations. If there is no farmer who leases the land, nature organizations buying it get a management allowance. If there is a farmer who leases the land, and who could continue managing it as a nature reserve, the organization gets a lease payment, but this is less than the management

allowance. So it is financially not so profitable to involve farmers in the management of their nature areas.

5% of the organizations claimed that involving farmers in regional branding is sometimes not done because organizations are afraid of losing power or work. Nature organizations for example, who were in charge of nature and landscape management in a region, can be threatened if farmers start taking over (a part of) this role. This is not limited to nature organizations, the same situation can occur with other regional organizations.

(A nature organization in our region) wants to manage sunken roads themselves, saying it is too delicate. It happens that when a farmer managed one of these roads, and left a sign there (this is a sign saying "landscape-builder at work", with 'land-builder' being the literal translation of the Dutch word for farmer. This sign is used by an organization involving farmers in landscape management), that this sign disappears after a couple of days. For some people it is apparently a thorn in the flesh that it is shown that farmers manage the landscape. But the militant in me says that this is a good thing, that we're going in the right direction, if this topic is so sensitive. (organization Haspengouw)

Evaluation of farmers as landscape managers in regional branding: by farmers

The interviews with farmers revealed some reasons why farmers would like to be involved in landscape management in the framework of regional branding processes and why not, or which problems they foresee. Through their contacts with farmers, however, the organizations interviewed could also provide some information on this. Some reasons were mentioned significantly more by farmers than by organizations, and vice versa.

Reasons for involvement

The motivation mentioned most by farmers for an active role in regional branding is an ideological one (38% of the farmers). 13% of the organizations have also mentioned this. Farmers want this active role in regional branding out of respect for nature and the landscape; because it satisfies them to keep the region clean and beautiful for other people; because they want farm buildings with charm and a soul and not industrial boxes; because they find standard trees, hedges, pools etc. beautiful; because they want to contribute to the wellbeing of their region, etc.

I like it to drive around in the village with my tractor and to be respected and seen as someone who has respect for nature and takes care of the environment. We only live once, and I believe we have to make things as agreeable as possible for everyone. If I make the road dirty, which happens now and then, then I clean it afterwards. (farmer Haspengouw)

From the organizations' point of view, the main motivation of farmers for an active role in regional branding is gaining an extra income (24%). For farmers, this is the second most important motivation (17%). Some organizations claim that farmers choose to install or manage landscape elements, because they lost some other sources of income. However, they all admit that the money farmers get for these activities is not that much, so there has to be some ideological motivation involved as well. The same story can be heard at the farmers' side, who admit that the subsidies can compensate the loss of income support, or lower prices, but not entirely so that there's always an ideological motivation involved as well. Farmers with farm tourism or recreation have said to engage in nature and landscape management to attract customers.

It's like they would say to you: you have to give up part of your wage to stimulate the environment. Nobody would like this. If you have to give up part of your land, without any compensation, this is difficult. Because land is yield and yield is money, and everybody works to earn something. But if this is compensated with a payment, then it becomes possible. This is the reason why more farmers are engaged in landscape management: because they are more aware, but also because they are partly compensated for this. (farmer Meetjesland)

13% of the farmers claim they want to be involved in regional branding to improve the image of farming, and this is also mentioned by 11% of the organizations. Farmers are concerned about their image, which has worsened over the last decades. As a result they want to be involved in nature and landscape management, embellishing their farms, etc. to improve their image (and the image of their

products) towards other locals, their family and friends and society as a whole. One farmer claimed it is natural to be concerned about your image. Also other local people are concerned that their house and garden look good.

...planting hedges, trees, embellishing the farm, put some green here and there...Farmers want agriculture to have a positive image and with these activities, they're on the right track. (farmer Haspengouw)

Finally, two farmers and one organization claimed that the extra activities connected to regional branding were taken up because they didn't have a large effect on the farm management anyway. At some moments in the year, farmers have more time available and can easily take up extra activities. Concerning parcel edges, one farmer claimed he doesn't mind that these edges are sown with a flower mix, because it is difficult to manage them anyway. Three farmers mentioned they were involved in landscape management, because they were stimulated to do this by people from governments, regional or farmers' organizations.

So the farmers were all rather reluctant, but those who told me "what a crazy idea you have", now have even more hectares of parcel edges than myself. Because they also started to see the economic benefits ... People are always a bit suspicious in the beginning, but you have to be able to convince them. (farmer Meetjesland)

Reasons for no involvement

Again both farmers and members of organizations mentioned possible reasons why farmers don't have or want an active role in landscape management in the framework of regional branding. The reason which was most mentioned was a lack of knowledge. 42% of the farmers indicate that they have little knowledge on initiatives for regional branding in their region, or that they don't know organizations involved in this. Some say that if you don't ask the organizations yourself to be involved, then this won't happen.

33% of the farmers feel it's difficult to participate or won't participate in local landscape management because of reasons related to policies (mentioned by 11% of the organizations). First of all farmers fear that this will go along with too much bureaucracy. Another concern related to policies is that they can create extra costs. For example, parcel edges can give rise to more weeds and reduce the amount of land you have and thus the number of animals you can keep (because of manure policy). The conditions to get subsidies are also not always understood by farmers. For example, why you can only get subsidies for old varieties of standard trees, while new standard trees produce better/more fruits and have the same effect on the landscape. Some regulations are considered to be unfair, like the fact that the legal destination of your farmland can change when you use it for nature or landscape purposes. The short term of projects, the lack of flexibility in rules, and the vagueness of rules are also mentioned as a negative factor by farmers.

When I look at the rateable value, it's historically determined that the rateable value of standard tree orchards is the highest. Then you have to imagine: to have a standard tree orchard, you should be an idealist, like me. You have to pay a higher lease price, because this is based on the rateable value. (farmer Haspengouw)

33% of the farmers doesn't want to get involved or finds it difficult to get involved in landscape management because it is not profitable. When things are going well in agriculture, or when the soil in a certain area is really good, some farmers believe it's not profitable to engage in other activities. Costs also arise when engaging in these activities, as already mentioned before. When a farmer has ecological grasslands, for example, this might be better for nature and landscape, but gives a worse quality of hay. The fear that it's not profitable to get involved in regional branding, is the obstacle which is most mentioned by organizations (21%).

25% of the farmers have mentioned obstacles which are related to the image of the farmer. According to some farmers, tasks related to landscape management are not the kind of tasks a real, successful farmer does. Some mention that other farmers look down on farmers involved in these kinds of activities. Another problem mentioned, which is related to image, is that citizens don't appreciate farmers and the work they do. Problems related to image are mentioned by 16% of the organizations. They claim that farmers are ashamed when they do tasks related to regional branding, that they don't think of it as real farming or that they are afraid of the reaction of other farmers.

So I asked the farmer whether he wanted to rebuild some of the chapels in our region. The man had also renovated his house and stables. The farmer said: "I can't do that, what are people going to think of me. I won't sit on my knees next to a chapel and then everybody passes and says 'Has it come this far already'" I told him: "You know what you should do? You pour some concrete in a mould in your barn and on it you build a chapel. And then you bring it to the field with a fork-lift truck." So in the seclusion of his farm, he could build the chapel well and with pleasure, and then he brought it incognito to the field. (organization Haspengouw)

25% of the farmers and 16% of the organizations say it's difficult to participate in regional development or branding because of practical concerns, like a lack of time. Trimming hedges, for example, has to be done at the time of the year when there is most work on the farm. Another practical concern is that landscape management doesn't fit with every type of farming.

Finally, 21% of the farmers believes a lack of trust can be an obstacle for an active role in landscape management. A lack of trust can be caused by farmers not getting their payment for certain tasks, this payment being less than expected, or not coming in time. Farmers also believe that the approval of local projects (e.g. in LEADER) is sometimes politically influenced, which reduces trust. Certain local individuals, involved in regional branding, are also not trusted by farmers. Another issue related to a lack of trust, is the fear of farmers that participating in regional branding will lead to restrictions or unfavourable developments (like an abundance of tourists). 16% of the organizations also mention a lack of trust as an obstacle. They claim that landscape management is mostly associated with nature organizations and that farmers don't trust them, hence they don't like to cooperate in this.

I didn't have contacts with the Parc Naturel des Deux Ourthes. Being a farmer, I'm afraid that they will put up zones and restrict us, a bit like with Natura 2000... (farmer PN20)

How to better involve farmers in landscape management in the framework of regional branding

From the previous sections it becomes clear that involving farmers in landscape management, in the framework of regional branding processes, can have benefits for farmers and regional organizations. If organizations would then want to involve farmers in the regional branding process, what is the best way to proceed? Both the interviews with farmers as the interviews with organizations give insights on this matter.

The main recommendation, given by 50% of the farmers and 34% of the organizations, is to stimulate farmers and to create trust. Personal contact seems to be important here: if organizations want farmers to be involved, asking them personally will have the biggest effect. Also important is to have trustworthy individuals/organizations to convince farmers: people who know agriculture, who are trusted by farmers, who keep their word, etc. Related to trust, governments need to be careful with changing the legal destination of farm land to nature. The fear for this is often keeping farmers from getting involved in landscape or nature management. For farmers to trust that regional branding won't have negative impacts on their farm, it is good to involve them in the planning concerning this topic.

I saw things happening in our region of which I thought: what a pity. I saw beautiful nature values disappear at that moment. I found it a pity. Really, pollard willows standing beside a pool, they were all gone, razed to the ground. Just because the farmers feared that these natural elements would result in the spatial destination of their farmland being changed to nature land. Stupid policy according to me. They should have told the farmers: our intention is to create more nature values, but we will do this through you. Then you would have had a completely different conversation. (farmer Meetjesland)

According to organizations, the best way to get farmers involved in regional branding is to make this financially interesting (mentioned by 47% of the organizations). This is also mentioned by 21% of the farmers. However, subsidies given shouldn't be used to keep unviable farm businesses alive. One organization in Haspengouw recommended involving farmers in this economic part: let them co-decide on their payment for landscape and nature management. Practical recommendations given by farmers were to decrease the rateable value on land with standard trees, or organizing competitions for the best looking farm or farmland as an incentive for a better integration of farms in the landscape. Competition between farmers as a result of stimulating alternative activities too much should be avoided. Competition between farmers and other sectors should be avoided as well.

Farmers as landscape managers shouldn't take over the task of the gardeners' sector, nature organizations in reserves, etc. It is important that these different actors don't compete, but find common objectives and reach synergy. To be able to make involvement in regional branding financially interesting for farmers, enough financial means should of course be available.

It's very important to involve farmers in price setting. If I take on a (landscape management) job for €1000 and I go and ask a farmer whether he can do it for this price, he is hesitating. If you however discuss first with the farmer how much work it requires, how much taxes he would have to pay, and then ask him "what if we would put a price of €1000 on it?", then the farmer will agree more easily. The involvement of the farmer in the economic aspect is very important. (organization Haspengouw)

According to 29% of the organizations and 13% of the farmers, involving farmers in regional branding requires creating a positive attitude towards this issue and activities related to this. There is a need to convince farmers of the value of their patrimony, of the important role they play in the countryside, etc. Convincing farmers of this needs to be done by people who are trusted by farmers, and needs to be incorporated in agricultural education. Creating a positive attitude of farmers towards landscape management can also be done by communicating this role of the farmer to the public. The experiences in Haspengouw show that when the role of the farmer in regional development is communicated to the public (e.g. through signs which say that a farmer is managing the landscape and nature), farmers often receive appreciation for this. This is good for the self-esteem of farmers and it can make farmers proud of this role in society.

Financial means are important, very important, but if it's not between the ears of the farmer then it has no use. If he doesn't understand, then his efforts will lack verve. I think that introducing the concept of multifunctional agriculture in communication and education is very important. And then you need of course financial means. The one reinforces the other, but you have to have them both. (organization Meetjesland)

A good way to involve farmers in regional branding is to let them cooperate, with each other or with other groups. This is the opinion of 24% of the organizations and 8% of the farmers. Cooperation is important because it can cut costs, farmers can e.g. buy machines for landscape management together, or create a bigger output. This was mentioned by an organization in Haspengouw organizing landscape management by farmers. Within this organization, farmers manage other farmers' hedges. The latter still get rewarded for having a hedge but give part of the money to the farmer managing this hedge. This leads to a higher amount of farmers with hedges. Cooperation can also save time. In Haspengouw a farmer is working together with hunters for the management of his parcel edges. The hunters benefit from these hedges, because they form the perfect habitat for birds. Cooperation finally allows a better coordination of local initiatives, increasing their compatibility, and stimulates learning.

A final recommendation, mentioned by 34% of the organizations and 8% of the farmers, is to facilitate the practical aspects of an involvement in regional branding, like helping them with paperwork, giving them advice, organizing activities at times when there's not much work on the farms, providing farmers with plant material, etc. A gradual introduction of policies and educating farmers in their new role, can also help facilitating these practical aspects.

Discussion and conclusions

This article is about the perspectives for farmers to be integrated in regional branding processes through landscape management. Agriculture has an influence on regional identity and some local actors, such as the tourism and the real estate sector, profit from this. It should, however, also be possible for agriculture to profit from an attractive regional identity, to which they contribute. As such, a sustainable local system can be created in which agriculture and the rest of the local economy reinforce each other. In the paper this was called the circle of rural competitiveness. Regional branding can be a way to strengthen this local system and lift it to a higher level. However, for regional branding to work, and lead to higher ecological, economic and social sustainability of the region and its agriculture, a suitable governance system is needed. In the following paragraphs some recommendations will be given on how to achieve this.

The results discussed in the previous section indicate first of all that successful regional branding should go along with a good communication strategy. Although local organizations and governments involved in regional branding expressed a willingness to involve farmers in landscape management, a lot of farmers are not even aware of the existence of these organizations and their activities. Moreover, regional branding often causes resistance from farmers, because they are afraid that it will cause them troubles like loss of land, loss of financial means for agriculture, costs related to excessive tourism, and so on. As a result, farmers are blocking walking routes, removing small landscape elements, etc. and as such negatively influencing the regional branding process.

Some organizations do efforts to communicate their strategy to the local public through folders, local newspapers, local events, but this doesn't seem to have a significant effect on the farmers' population. A recommendation given in the interviews to overcome this problem is personal communication: people going to the farmer, explaining them their plans and asking them to cooperate. In order for this strategy to work however, it is important that farmers trust these people. Cooperation between regional organizations and farmers organizations can therefore be a key to success. This of course requires that farmers organizations are convinced that farmers' participation in regional branding is beneficial for the agricultural sector. Other strategies to increase trust in regional branding processes among farmers is that organizations and governments keep their word, don't change legislations or strategies too often, and that there is no favouritism. Communication between the farmers population and regional organizations can also increase the understanding of organizations for the farmers' situation. Some organizations believe farmers should manage the landscape without getting financially compensated for this, because they have a responsibility towards society. A better communication could create more understanding between both groups.

The results show that involving farmers in landscape management can save costs, because they are already managing a large part of the land, but at the same time also creates costs. It takes time to convince farmers to participate, and it also seems to be difficult to establish a sustainable cooperation with them. At the same time, local organizations and governments often don't possess the financial means to foresee substantial financial compensations for farmers. The latter however makes landscape management interesting for farmers. A solution for this problem could be a better cooperation between local organizations. On the other hand, once the regional branding process is successful this automatically generates more financial means. A possible way to generate financial means for landscape management by farmers is through a regional fund. In the case of the region Groene Woud in the Netherlands, this fund is linked to a special savings account: people save money on an account of a particular bank, which deposits part of the capital on the account into the regional fund. However, regional branding also provides more opportunities for farmers to diversify their activities and take up farm tourism, or processing and sales of regional (labelled) farm products. The success of these activities depends also on the degree to which farmers take care of the landscape, so they can provide him with extra incentives for landscape management.

The local governance system concerning regional branding is often of a polycentric nature, which means that there are many organizations involved, each with a different approach to regional branding (nature, tourism, heritage, etc.). In order for their initiatives to complement each other and not counteract, it is important that they develop a common strategy for regional branding. The interaction with the farmers in the region and a common action and financing plan in this regard could be a solution. Together, they can also investigate possibilities to attract money for landscape management from local companies or private people.

An attractive compensation payment can however not be sufficient to convince farmers to get involved in landscape management. Some farmers fear negative effects on their image when they would engage in these activities, because they still attach a high symbolic value to the classical production activities. Agricultural education can contribute in changing this attitude, but seminars or courses can also be organized for farmers at local level to try and change their mindset towards these activities. These courses can also go deeper into concrete benefits for the farmers and their region as a whole. Another solution is to make this role of the farmer as landscape manager visible to the people, e.g. by working with signs indicating that the landscape is provided by the farmer.

Positive reactions of other people can arouse pride and give farmers a positive attitude towards landscape management. Finally, there is a need to assist the farmers with practical aspects of landscape management. Limiting the paperwork, organizing activities at times when the farmer has less work on the farm, stimulating cooperation in the work and the use of machinery can all help to keep the workload as little as possible.

Finally, the concept of regional branding can contribute to building sustainable landscapes, on the ecological, social and economic level. Regional branding requires distinctive landscape characteristics and therefore stimulates the use of local plant and animal breeds and the preservation of typical local landscape elements, which prevents them from disappearing. From a social point of view, regional branding stimulates the creation of recreation elements in the landscape which can increase the wellbeing of local people and decreases the need for holidays or recreation further from home. The latter is also good from an ecological point of view. Finally, regional branding can create a dynamic in which the landscape finances itself: the landscape generates income from, for example, tourism and recreation and part of this private money can then be reinvested back in the landscape.

A further step in the research could be to compare the Belgian case studies with best-practice cases in other countries in order to further optimize the policy recommendations. Finally, in order to assess the real potential of regional branding for local farmers, there is a need for more quantitative research on the possible income farmers can get from these processes. It is particularly interesting to investigate the potential of financing schemes which make use of private funding. Especially in the Netherlands, some examples of these schemes can be found, e.g. the landscape auctions or regional funds. Further research should shed more light on this issue.

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