

AT3 (Mittleres Ennstal, Austria):

The impact of agricultural landscapes on rural development and regional competitiveness – Results of a short expert valuation

Objective

Our study in Mittleres Ennstal in Austria aims at estimating, how much agricultural landscape is perceived to impact on different factors of competitiveness and which actors within a rural society mainly benefit from services provided in the local landscape. Furthermore, being assumed to have the strongest influence on agricultural landscape management and consequently on the landscape services provided, the study targets to assess the impact of different agro-environmental measures on regional competitiveness.

Methodology

In this study we conduct a short expert survey. The survey considers the most important local institutions being involved in the question of how to generate value from the resource “local landscape”. The identification of the institutions was supported by 5 local key stakeholders, who have been identified in line with an upstream local stakeholder laboratory. Finally, 22 institutions representing agriculture, tourism, local administration, local economy, nature conservation and rural development took part in the survey. The survey itself was carried out using a structured questionnaire sent out to all institutions.

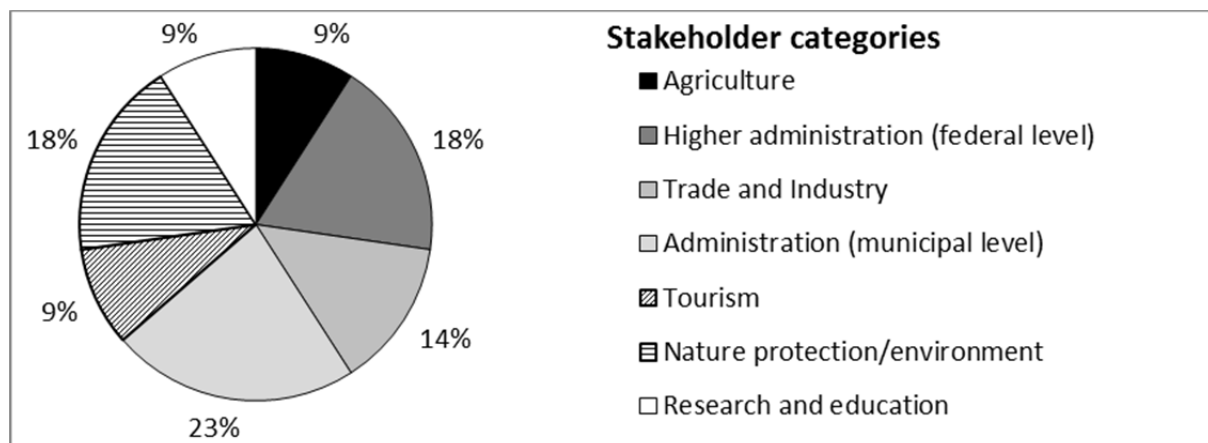


Figure 1. Share of stakeholder groups taking part in the survey.

The impact of landscape on different factors of competitiveness

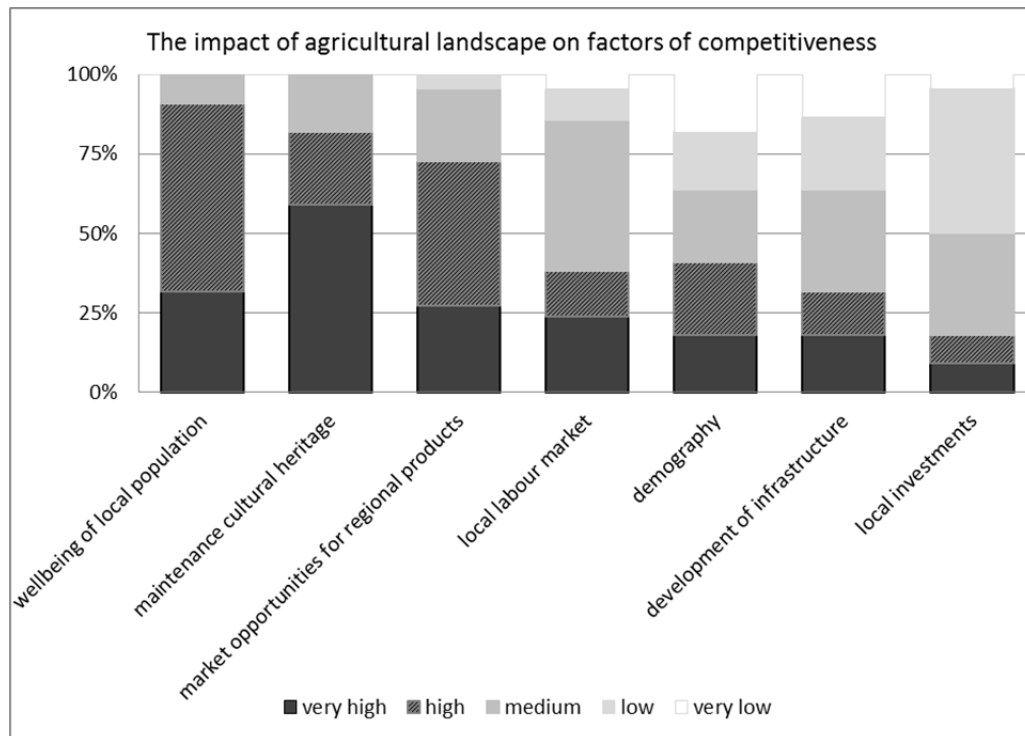
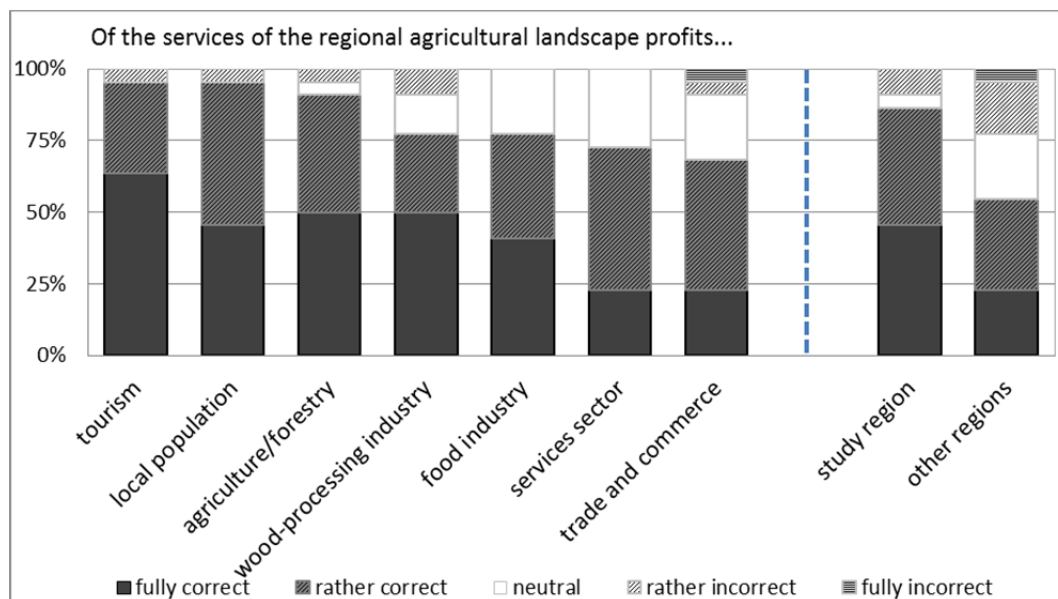


Figure 2. The impact of agricultural landscape on factors of competitiveness.

In general the results of the survey indicate that the local landscape in Mittleres Ennstal is perceived to have an influence on a variety of social and economic factors of competitiveness. However, it becomes clear that the strongest impacts are assigned to “soft” competitiveness factors, such as the wellbeing of inhabitants and the maintenance of the cultural heritage, rather than on “hard” economic factors such as “job-creation”, “demography”, “infrastructural development” or “local investments”. The only high “economic” impact of landscape is awarded to its potential to enhance the marketing opportunities of regional products.

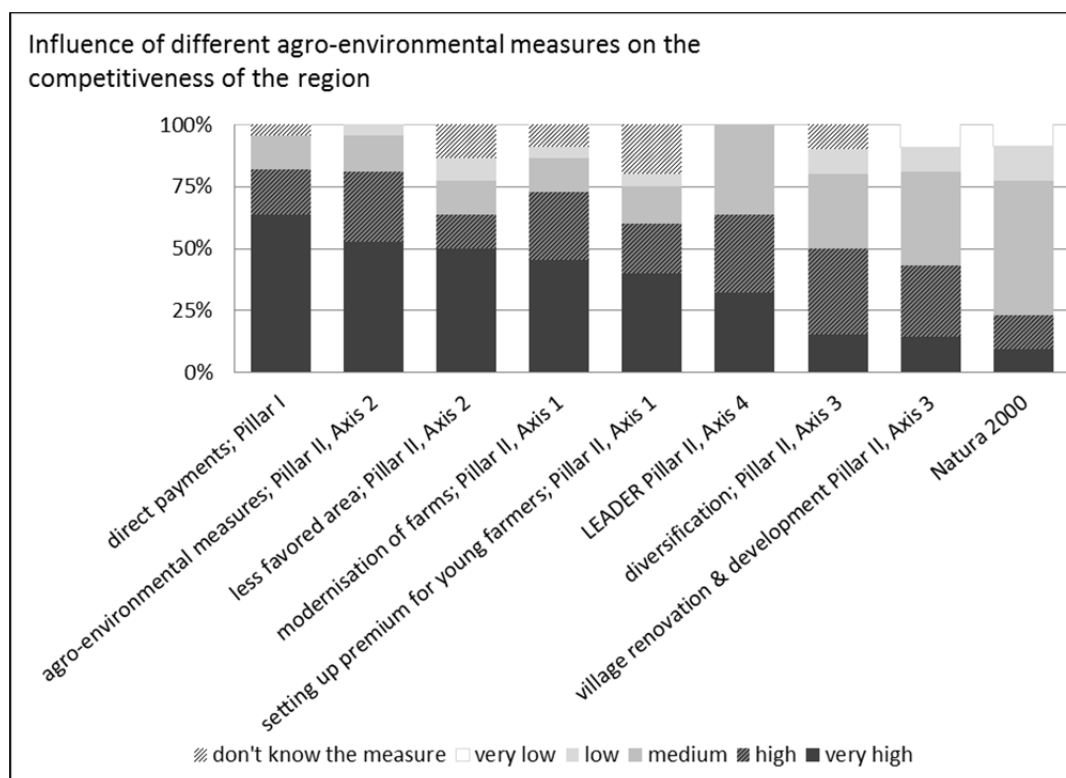
Beneficiaries of landscape and landscape services

The results also show that many actors in a rural economy are perceived to benefit from landscape and its services. Local inhabitants and tourism, both receiving first and foremost public good-type, cultural services from the local landscape, are perceived to be the main beneficiaries. It also becomes obvious, that landscape is perceived to create benefits mainly for such sectors of the local economy, which are directly managing landscape or which are closely connected to the production of marketable goods in agricultural landscapes (agriculture and forestry, wood-processing industry and food industry). Other economic sectors, which receive rather indirect and second order effects from landscape and landscape services, such as the trade & commerce or the services sector, are perceived to benefit remarkably less. As regards the question, where benefits of the valorisation of landscape are felt, the evaluation of the experts clearly emphasise the local level.



The influence of agro-environmental measures on the competitiveness of the region

In general those CAP measure, which are accompanied by the highest funding amounts in the CSA, such as direct payments, agro-environmental measures and less favoured area payments, are perceived to contribute the most to the competitiveness of the region. Also rated of rather high importance is the rural development program modernisation of farms. The influence of the bottom-up approach of “Leader” is also estimated to have in sum a medium to very high contribution to the regional competitiveness; even if this evaluation is not reflected in high payments.



Noticeable is the rather low influence attributed to the CAP measure “*diversification*”: The support of the EU for agro-tourism, gastronomy, improvements in value chains, marketing of regional products, consulting, as well as the support of social and communal services, renewable energy etc. in principle target at possibilities to enhance the value of agricultural landscape management via higher level socio-economic effects. The measure contributing the least to regional competitiveness is estimated to be measure Natura 2000.

Lesson learned & Policy Recommendations

The results of the study show that the CAP measures implemented in the Mittleres Ennstal are clearly perceived to contribute to the competitiveness of agriculture in the region. The results of the survey shows, that this influence of the CAP is highly appreciated and estimated to also have impacts on the overall competitiveness of the region.

The results of the expert survey indicate that landscape in the study region is perceived to have first and foremost an influence on “soft” competitiveness factors, such as the wellbeing of inhabitants and the maintenance of the cultural heritage. The main beneficiaries of landscape are consequently perceived to be local inhabitants and tourism, both benefitting from “soft factors” within the field of cultural services. In contrast, the influence of landscape on higher-level socio-economic factors driving regional competitiveness, such as “job-creation” “demography”, “infrastructural development” or “investments” is perceived to be considerably lower. Hand in hand with this evaluation goes the perception, that besides residents and tourists, landscape withholds benefits first and foremost for such sectors of the local economy, which are directly connected to the production of marketable landscape products than for economic sectors receiving mainly indirect benefits from landscape.

In many results the survey shows that landscape is still perceived to created value mainly via the use of cultural services as well as making use of private-good type, “marketable” services. People have a higher consciousness towards consumptive and marketable goods provided by a certain environment, than towards essential, but hardly discernible, and mainly indirect benefits from the use of public good-type services.

A policy implication of the study is that a more efficient and continuous communication strategy between scientists, decision makers, local administrations and civil society might reduce a knowledge distance and make population aware of the manifold services provided by the landscapes they are surrounded by.

Responsible partner/person

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