

Landcare in Germany ? – We are not alone

Brett de Hayr – National Landcare Facilitator
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Since its inception in Australia in the 1980's, Landcare is now present in varying forms in over 17 countries in the Pacific, Africa, North America, Europe and south East Asia. Germany is an example of a developed economy that has an active and dynamic Landcare movement, which in some ways has many similarities to Landcare in Australia, but also has its own unique characteristics. The following is an extract from the German Landcare Association and more detail can be found at http://www.lpv.de/fileadmin/user_upload/data_files/Publikationen/English_Documents/Landcare_in_Germany.pdf



In Germany, there were two seemingly opposing groups - environmentalists on the one side and farmers on the other - with different ideas on how to manage the land. However, local political leaders and representatives of local nature conservation agencies brought these two groups together. The first regional Landcare Association (LCA) was founded in Bavaria in 1986 to enhance co-operation between these opposing interest groups.

Interestingly, Landcare in Germany started at about the same time, as it started in Australia in 1986. Nobody had actually brought – in the idea of Landcare to Germany – it happened by coincidence, but later, the expression, “Landcare” was adopted from Australia – it gives the right impression – caring for the land we manage. This idea came from pioneer leaders of the three founding groups (farmers, conservationists, politicians).



Today, activists, farmers and local administrations are working together to implement integrated and sustainable land management practices in many rural areas of

Germany. This approach, which was then referred to as Landcare, was found successful, because each group had an equal voice – no group was stronger than the other. Since then, the Landcare approach or concept spread quickly in some parts of Germany.

Financial support from the Federal Ministry for the Environment was sought, to initiate a project to spread the Landcare concept more actively. Conservation groups, farmers and local politicians initiated the formation of local LCAs, and by 2006, 141 regional LCAs have been formed across Germany. With funding support from local and national governments, some local LCAs lobbied for, and initiated efforts to create the German Association for Landcare (Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege e.V., or DVL), and in 1993, the DVL was created as an umbrella association, representing all LCAs at the national level.

Europe has been cultivated for centuries. This has led to diverse landscapes in the countryside with mountain-meadows, poor-soil pastures, hedgerows and orchards. Unless continually managed by farmers, these areas will be left under fallow, or revert to forests. The endangered flora and fauna that have adapted to these extensive farmland habitats will disappear, and the regions would lose their attraction both to investors and tourists. It was believed that maintaining these diverse cultivated landscapes can still meet the desired conservation goals, and benefits rural communities and tourism.

This is where most Landcare Associations (LCAs) in Germany are currently focused. The LCAs bridge the gap between and among diverse land use interests, bringing regional stakeholders together to coordinate their various interests. For instance, farmers want to earn money from their hard work, the tourism industry wants to sell a magnificent landscape, while conservationists are concerned about the security of plant and animal habitats. Subsequently, Landcare groups supported the idea of linking farmers' interests with aspects of sustainable land use and biodiversity.

In general, Landcare-Germany aims to:

1. Create a network of natural habitats in order to protect the native fauna and flora as well as the biological resources in all of Germany's cultivated landscapes.
2. Support environment friendly land use systems and regional economic development.
3. Help farmers earn additional income from conservation and landscape management and market their regional products.
4. Raise awareness of the importance of appropriate land management through the Landcare approach, involving the formal education system (even Kindergartens) to ensure that Landcare is mainstreamed in current and future education curriculum and programs.

Landcare coordinators organize and supervise the implementation of activities with local farmers, and monitor project outcomes. In all these processes, coordinators closely work with local communities, conservation groups, and government authorities such as conservation, agriculture, forestry and water management authorities. But farmers are the main "actors" in the implementation phase because they are more familiar with their local landscape.

In Germany, the community has great influence on land management issues. Hence, LCAs work with local communities, involving the local mayor and the municipal council. They are crucial stakeholders in initiating Landcare projects on public lands, such as those focused on improving grazing on conservation sites and watercourse-restoration. In some cases, the local community acquires adjacent lands from farmers and landowners to improve the watercourse in a Landcare project.

Initially, Landcare projects evolved from just planting trees or hedges and grass cutting, to maintaining diverse cultivated landscapes. Later, a new strategy was developed to promote sustainable management of extensive land-use systems, by helping farmers market their quality products, such as apple juice and lamb-meat. These products, which are typical commodities from different regions, are produced under environment-friendly production systems.

Farmers are also being helped to “create” and market new “nature-conservation products”, like lamb-meat from dry limestone pastures as a regional speciality. Product expansion, like apple juice from orchards has shown a great potential in the establishment of regional economies. This has helped farmers, restaurant owners, local butchers, and the local economy as a whole—increasing cash-flow within the local market.

LCAs rely on the principle of voluntary participation, where it is found crucial for long-term success and sustainability. LCAs act upon the request of landowners such as local communities, private persons or organisations. Its strength lies, where official competence and regulation find their limit.

No landscape looks the same-- each habitat requires a different management approach. Hence, LCAs considers regional differences and focuses on the preservation of specific landscapes. Instead of uniformity, the LCAs promote regional diversity, which forms the basis for long-term attractiveness for recreation and tourism.

During the last twenty years, Landcare in Germany has developed into a powerful force that catalyses positive change in the way agricultural landscapes and conservation areas are currently managed, particularly in less favoured areas. Although, this process did not go without problems and challenges, the main source of strength, where Landcare has drawn its success is from the commitment and cooperation of the farming communities that share a common purpose – more than 20.000 farmers all over Germany are now working together within their LCA structures to maintain the natural beauty and ecological capital of their regions.

While Germany is the only country in Europe which utilises the term Landcare, there is a network of similar organisations across Europe. In October last year, **Josef Göppel, Member of the German Parliament and a long time leading figure in the** German Association for Landcare provided a presentation on Landcare in Germany and Europe to the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity in Japan. This highlights the extent to which Landcare has grown and the breadth of its influence.

