

Future Visions for Agricultural Landscapes in the Wet Tropics

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Mossman coastal landscape and possible futures

Top: Mossman landscape 2003
 Middle: Scenario I – Keeping the mill – Mossman landscape 2023
 Bottom: Scenario II – Imagine if the mill closed down – Mossman landscape 2023

Context

Changes in the sugar industry and a need for greater protection of the Great Barrier Reef open up new opportunities to plan for sustainable tropical landscapes that bridge the existing divide between production and protection landscapes.

Aims

To develop a framework for systematic landscape planning that provides a platform for farmers and the wider community to discuss and identify options for diversifying income sources, plan for their future and participate in the process of directing change towards sustainable future landscapes.

Study areas

Mossman – a coastal tropical lowland landscape and Julatten – a tropical upland landscape were chosen as two potential 'prototype landscapes' for the Wet Tropics of North Queensland.

Theory and Methods

A socio-ecological framework with three stages was developed. Stakeholder participation is at the forefront of the framework and takes place throughout the research process. This approach was chosen based on the idea that people are part of the landscape system and act as the main agents of landscape change. Participatory methods used in:

STAGE I

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with a wide range of farmers and landholders in the Mossman and Julatten area
- Landscape assessments of the land managed by the interviewees

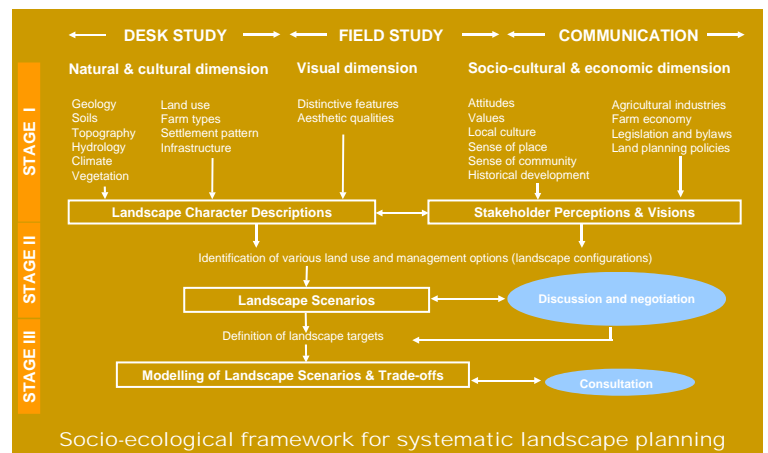
STAGE II

- Focus group meetings/workshops with
 - farmer groups (including agricultural industries)
 - tourism industry
 - environmental groups
 - concerned locals
 - indigenous groups

Landscape visualisations (see images above) are used as a tool to stimulate and focus workshop discussions on the potential environmental, social and economic trade-offs between different land use options.

STAGE III

- Fora with
 - representatives from each focus group
 - local government
 - resource managers
 - policy makers



Conclusion

Participation and communication in the planning for sustainable future landscapes allow social learning and democratic processes to take place at the local level. A shared vision for the future enhances community spirit and sense of place. Dialogue and transparency in decision-making potentially accelerates the implementation of planning projects that are founded on a shared community vision.



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