A STEP CHANGE TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

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A step change towards a more sustainable approach

PEGASUS is a Horizon 2020 project led by the Institute for European Environmental Policy that is helping to achieve the EU2020 vision of ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ regarding the use of agricultural and forestry land.

Despite the many benefits provided by agriculture and forestry land, there are also many challenges. These include climate change, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, water pollution, and loss of ecosystem services. These challenges are exacerbated by the increasing demand for food, energy, and materials. Therefore, there is a need to transform how we manage our agricultural and forestry land to be more sustainable.

The PEGASUS project is trying to achieve this by focusing on the role of stakeholders in decision-making. The project aims to help policymakers and practitioners understand how to engage stakeholders effectively, to ensure that their needs and interests are considered.

The project team is made up of experts from a variety of institutions across Europe, including universities, research centres, and government agencies. They are working together to identify the most effective ways to engage stakeholders and to ensure that their recommendations are implemented.

The project has already carried out a number of case studies in different countries, including Austria, Portugal, and Italy. These case studies have shown that it is possible to engage stakeholders effectively and to develop sustainable management practices.

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Project Insights

We want to raise awareness about the possibility and the importance of giving more weight to environmental and social considerations in land management decisions, and the necessity of doing so for the long-term resilience of agriculture and forest systems and businesses.

The researchers are especially interested in changing the narrative surrounding the perceived negative aspects of agricultural and forestry businesses on the environment. Many people perceive the economic aspects of agricultural and forestry businesses as inherently conflicting with environmental and social considerations. And often, land management decisions reflect this view. Maréchal explains: “With PEGASUS, we want to raise awareness about the possibility and the importance of giving more weight to environmental and social considerations in land management decisions and more generally in policy and in business practices. We also want to emphasise the necessity of doing so for the long-term resilience and sustainability of agriculture and forest systems.” It is the team’s belief that economic, environmental and social outcomes should not be considered in isolation and, instead, should be delivered jointly as part of a genuinely sustainable approach to land management.

For policy, this would mean providing more flexibility to the mix of policy tools available and increasingly seeing a greater mix of private funding working alongside public payments. Importantly, PEGASUS has shown the key role of determining needs and priorities at the local level and then having appropriate governance and institutional settings in place to suit the local situation. Investing in knowledge exchange, advice and facilitation is critical, as policies need to work with the motivations and interests of people best placed to take action.
Impact Objectives

• Develop innovative approaches and new ways of thinking about the way farmland and forests are managed in Europe

• Stimulate a long-lasting improvement in the provision of public goods and ecosystem services from agricultural and forest land

Delivering more environmental and social benefits from farming and forestry

Anne Maréchal, Kaley Hart and David Baldock and the PEGASUS team are working to develop ideas for a more holistic approach to managing farmland and forests, with a view to maximising environmental and social benefits across the European Union.

What are the key goals of the Public Ecosystem Goods And Services from land management – Unlocking the Synergies (PEGASUS) project?

AM: The main objectives are to find new ways and approaches to thinking about how agriculture and forestry can deliver a sustained provision of environmental and social benefits in the long term — alongside the production of food, timber, fuel, etc. — and subsequently contribute these insights to the policy process as well as for practice.

Can you tell us about the approach of PEGASUS?

KH: The PEGASUS project has taken a participatory approach to research. We believe this enabled the team to get nearer to the core of what makes initiatives aimed at enhancing environmental and social benefits successful and what some of the barriers to action are. By involving stakeholders throughout the process, both in the co-

development of the case studies and in reviewing the findings of the work, we believe our evidence for developing concrete tools and recommendations, for policy and for practice, is based firmly in the realities and cultural differences experienced in operating in different parts of the European Union (EU).

What do the terms ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘public goods’ mean?

AM: The concept of ecosystem services comes from ecological science. The concept highlights the interdependency and feedback loops between countless ecosystem processes, elements and outputs which result in ‘services’ being delivered to society. In relation to agriculture and forestry, the ecosystem services concept encompasses both the production of food, feed, fibre and timber, as well as environmental and cultural services such as clean water, pollination and attractive rural landscapes.

The public goods concept was developed from economic theory to refer to goods (or services) that are not provided to a sufficient extent via the market, i.e. the normal interplay of supply and demand, such as biodiversity or cultural landscapes. They are defined as having two main characteristics: ‘not rival’ (if the good is consumed by one person, it does not reduce the benefit available to others) and ‘not excludable’ (if the good is available to one person, others cannot be excluded from enjoying its benefits).

Why are these concepts integral to your work?

DB: In PEGASUS, we focus on those goods and services whose supply is imperfectly rewarded by markets. We have used the term ‘environmental and social benefits’ as a means to bridge the two concepts to refer to those environmental and social outcomes which society would like to see being delivered through — in our case — appropriate agricultural and forestry land management. These environmental and social benefits may have more or less clear public goods and/or ecosystem service characteristics, but there is public demand for them.

How do you intend to transfer the knowledge gained through PEGASUS to the relevant stakeholders?

KH: In two ways. Firstly, we are developing a toolkit for practitioners which is intended to make the lessons we have learned from our case studies accessible to local leaders or facilitators wishing to start or further develop collective initiatives to enhance the provision of environmental and/or social benefits. It provides tips and guidance based on the challenges and obstacles commonly faced by people initiating a collective action and what our findings tell us in terms of how to overcome them. Secondly, our lessons for policy and practice will include recommendations about how to make policies more effective, the extent to which maps can be used as a tool to inform policies, and ways to encourage greater engagement on the ground. This, in turn, should facilitate the emergence and development of local initiatives by rural stakeholders.