Societal engagement in Natura 2000 sites. A comparative analysis of the policies in three areas in England, Denmark and Germany

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ABSTRACT

Several governments in Europe have explicit ambitions to increase societal engagement in the management of Natura 2000 areas. However, implementing this ambition in practice remains a challenge. This article reviews experiences in three Natura 2000 sites in countries in which local level policies exist to improve societal engagement. By defining the elements of the different policies employed in terms of storylines, instruments, organizational structure and style of interaction, and evaluating to what extent these address societal and governmental arguments for societal involvement, wider lessons are drawn on how governments might tackle this complex issue. The area cases show that a hierarchical governance mode is combined with governance modes that are based more on cooperation, market mechanisms or responsiveness to societal energy in order to achieve societal engagement that goes further than acceptance of nature designations.

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1. Introduction

Natura 2000 is a network of protected nature areas in the European Union that was established under the 1992 Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC[1]). The designation of this network by EU Member States has been criticized for being an overly government-driven and top-down approach, with a lack of stimulus for stakeholder involvement (Crofts, 2014; Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010; Hiedanpaa, 2002). In response, authorities have begun to invite landowners, entrepreneurs and communities to take a more active role in the planning, use and management of Natura 2000 sites (Young et al., 2013; Boller et al., 2013; Ferranti et al., 2014). Sociopolitical trends, such as increased citizen empowerment and the changing role of the public sector, have contributed to this development. Over the past decade, the influence of neoliberal politics in many Western European countries has shifted the emphasis on citizen participation further towards the notion of active citizenship and coproduction of public goods and services (e.g. Pestoff, 2006; Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006; Bovaird, 2007). We have seen this, for instance, in the term 'big society' in the UK and in the 'participation society' in the Netherlands (Cabinet office, 2010; Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013). The expectation behind these concepts is that reducing the size and scope of the government will enable societal responsibility, local innovation and civic action (Kisby, 2010).

Even though the EU and Member States have made efforts to establish more societal engagement and a societal discourse in the process of implementing Natura 2000, the literature suggests that so far they have tended to take a regulatory and government-driven approach, in terms of both discourse and practice (see e.g. Apostolopoulou et al., 2012; Bouwma et al., 2010; Cent et al., 2014; Enengel et al., 2014; Turnhout et al., 2015; Young et al., 2013). This article investigates, from a social science perspective, how policies to improve societal engagement are dealt with and reconciled with the regulatory character of Natura 2000, especially in practice.

Little research on Natura 2000 has taken a social science perspective; most studies have taken a natural science perspective (Popescu et al., 2014). The studies available on social science topics deal with a wide range of issues, but few studies focus on governance and the role of public participation (Blicharska et al., 2016). Blicharska et al. (2016) conclude from a systematic review of 664 studies that despite the widely recognized importance of stakeholder participation, few studies have evaluated in detail the policies for societal engagement. Four studies directly evaluated participation processes (Apostolopoulou et al., 2012; Cent et al., 2014; Enengel et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013). The general picture is

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[1] In the Habitats Directive the term 'Natura 2000' is used for the first time. It also encompasses the special protection areas under the Birds Directive.

Table 1
Perspectives on societal engagement in Natura 2000 areas.

Societal engagement	Governmental perspective	Societal perspective
Normative (legitimacy)	Ensure acceptance of nature designations	Ensure active involvement of societal actors with initiatives
Instrumental (reaching goals)	Society contributes to finance and undertakes nature conservation management	Financial or other reward for societal contributions to the areas
Substantive (values)	Biodiversity goals central	Extend goals to include all societal values

a low prevalence of participatory practices in Natura 2000 and these were usually steered in a top-down manner with an asymmetric power distribution. The government decides who may participate and how, and it is usually about achieving legal requirements or other governmental needs (Blicharska et al., 2016). Blicharska et al. (2016) conclude that, in general, there is a need for more social science research on how the functioning of Natura 2000 can be improved, including societal engagement.

The literature overview in Section 2 illustrates that government interpretations of societal engagement in Natura 2000 reflect an overall regulatory character. We compare government and societal perspectives on societal engagement in Natura 2000 areas to determine whether or not government policies are responsive to societal motives to become involved. To explore how such societal engagement can be organized, we analyse the literature from a governance perspective to see how shifts in governance modes allow development of several modes of societal engagement, such as sharing responsibilities with societal actors, flexibility in goal setting and outsourcing (e.g. Reddel and Woolcock, 2004; Meuleman, 2008; Van der Steen et al., 2015). Section 3 sets out this analytical framework.

The core of the article is a qualitative research of three government policies for societal engagement in three Natura 2000 areas. We address the following questions: What types of policies for societal engagement do the authorities develop? How do these relate to the regulatory framework of Natura 2000? and How do the policies balance government perspectives for societal engagement with the arguments of social actors to get involved in these areas? The areas are Exmoor National Park (England, UK), Lille Vildmose (Denmark) and Nature Park Aukrug (in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany). Each have Natura 2000 sites within their boundaries and take different approaches to societal engagement. The methods and case selection are explained in Section 4 and Section 5 presents the results of the analysis. Section 6 contains a comparative analysis of the policies and practices. Section 7 contains the discussion and conclusions.

2. Societal engagement in Natura 2000 from two perspectives

In this section we compare arguments for societal engagement in Natura 2000 from governmental and societal perspectives. We show that the EU and Member States have invested in a more participatory approach to Natura 2000, but that government arguments for and interpretation of societal engagement in Natura 2000 reflect a regulatory and government-driven approach.

Arguments for stakeholder participation and co-management can be categorized as normative, substantive and instrumental (e.g. Young et al., 2013; Rauschmayer et al., 2009). *Normative* arguments relate to strengthening democratic processes, such as conflict resolution or avoidance, and strengthening the legitimacy of policies. Legitimacy is defined as having the support of those affected by the outcomes of binding collective decision making (Keulartz and Leistra, 2008). In all Member States the designation of the Natura 2000 sites led to conflicts with private landowners and other concerned actors (e.g. Beunen, 2006; Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010; Hiedanpaa, 2002; Geitzenauer et al., 2016; Grodzinska-Jurczak and Cent, 2011; Rauschmayer et al., 2009). In general, conflicts over

the designation processes of Natura 2000 sites in many Member States are related to democratic values, such as a perceived lack of information and consultation, and not being able to influence decisions (Bouwma et al., 2010; Hiedanpaa, 2002). To remediate the negative effects of the designation processes of the Natura 2000 sites, both the EU and Member States take efforts to increase societal engagement in the implementation phase through workshops, guidelines and interaction. This discourse is more participatory, but is still largely directed at education and information on Natura 2000 (Turnhout et al., 2015) and seeks to gain the acceptance of nature designations by societal actors (Ferranti et al., 2014). This may be explained by the fact that the designations are legally binding and cannot easily be changed. However, societal support for policies in general is no longer merely expressed by passive acceptance, but increasing through citizen action and initiative (e.g. Hajer, 2011; Van der Steen et al., 2015). Societal actors may want to take a proactive role in shaping their own living environment, express their support for nature areas actively and take responsibility, which is known as environmental citizenship (e.g. Buijs et al., 2012; Dobson and Bell, 2006). From a societal perspective, this means that policies for Natura 2000 should encompass the potential for societal actors to come forward with their own ideas and initiatives for the management of these areas.

Instrumental arguments for societal participation take a rational choice perspective, which assumes that actors make choices on the basis of rational deliberations on how best to achieve a certain end (Bevir and Rhodes, 2001). From this perspective, societal engagement for Natura 2000 can be understood as an effort to find the most efficient way to realize the Natura 2000 obligations. Instrumental arguments are among the core arguments used by governments to increase societal engagement in Natura 2000 areas. An important government argument for societal engagement is ensuring adequate management of the Natura 2000 areas through the active involvement of landowners and farmers. Besides, EU regulations oblige Member States to take adequate measures to protect the species and habitats the sites were designated for, and to do this they need the cooperation of private landowners. After all, most of the Natura 2000 sites in Europe are privately owned (Gallais, 2015). Agricultural management is particularly important as 63 habitat types depend on or can benefit from agricultural activities (Halada et al., 2011). From the perspective of social actors, instrumental arguments are about reaching their own goals in the most effective way. Landowners and farmers who want recognition of their ownership and land use rights in the designated areas may argue that becoming involved provides opportunities to demand sufficient compensation for possible income losses that they fear will result from Natura 2000 designations. Societal actors may also have other interests that they want to pursue. Often, financial instruments to compensate landowners and efforts to balance interests are needed to ensure societal involvement. This poses a challenge to governments that are trying to reduce public spending.

Substantive arguments for societal engagement are based on the local knowledge and values of the actors involved (Young et al., 2013), which may add quality to the Natura 2000 areas. Member States are bound to the EU objectives to protect particular species and habitats in a specific site and their first responsibility is to ensure the conservation status of the species and habitats in

Table 2
Governance modes and policy: operationalizing societal engagement.

Governance style & policy elements	Hierarchical governance	Market governance	Network governance	Self-governance
Societal engagement Storyline	Informed & consulted Government taking legitimate care of nature	Invited & contracted Private parties taking engaged care of nature	Interactive & co-created Public and private parties taking joint care of nature	Initiated & created Locals taking creative care of nature
Financial instruments	Public funding, taxes & benefits	Public-private contracting	Public-private funds & targeted subsidies	Public seed funding & donors
Communicative instruments	Meetings & brochures	Round tables & campaigns	Platforms & dialogue	Individual coaching & self-assessment
Local policy organization	Public based	Contractor based	Partnership based	Citizen based
Policy interaction style	Formal structure & enforcement by law	Formal negotiations & enforcement by contracts	Informal contacts & enforcement by agreements	Informal action & enforcement by choice/incidents

the Natura 2000 sites (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). Despite more participatory efforts, the EU and national governments continue to pursue a largely biodiversity oriented scientific discourse that appeals mainly to professionals, but is less compelling to others (Turnhout et al., 2015). Societal actors may be motivated more by other interests, such as socioeconomic, recreational, cultural and historical, and even emotional values (Bakker and Overbeek, 2005). Combining these values is a crucial challenge for governments who want to increase societal engagement, especially as the Natura 2000 framework for assessing human activities, plans and projects is strictly regulatory. The governmental and societal perspectives for societal engagement in Natura 2000 are illustrated in Table 1.

3. Analytical framework

We use a governance perspective to explore how governments organize societal engagement in the cases. We define governance as a process in which societal actors and governments work together to tackle policy problems and address challenges (Kooiman, 2003). Where active citizenship is involved, it involves a mix of activities in which both public service agents and societal actors share the responsibility for policy and the provision of public goods (Bovaird, 2007). Societal engagement in this article therefore refers to participating of societal actors in decision making, but also in taking care of nature and natural values. In this section, we use the concept of governance modes to operationalize policies for societal engagement. New governance modes have emerged that have the potential to allow societal initiative, balance interests and include societal values; in short, modes that might meet today's demands for societal engagement. Societal engagement has a different character according to the mode of governance. As existing policies are often still in place, a process of layering of governance modes occurs (Meuleman, 2008; Van der Steen et al., 2015). Governance modes appear, develop, accumulate and change over time.

Hierarchical governance operates in the context of the nation state and representative democracies. Legitimated by public elections, governments use authority to intervene in society and reach goals by imposing regulations (Meuleman, 2008). Public authorities are the core executors of public policy and they persuade society to accept these policies. In this mode of governance, societal engagement seeks to ensure passive public support through information provision and consultation procedures, and may lead to informed and consulted societal actors (see Table 2).

Network governance is a response to the realization that policy is increasingly the result of interaction between a multitude of actors. Public and private or societal parties try to reach shared goals by cooperating and negotiating in mutual dependence in coalitions (Rhodes, 1997; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2006). We can operationalize societal engagement in this mode as cooperation and interac-

tion where interests can be balanced. Ideally, societal engagement results in interactive and co-created solutions.

Market governance also has a participation component. In this mode of governance, business competition is the driving force for more efficiency in the public sector. A typical strategy is outsourcing, in which contract partners undertake government tasks (Meuleman, 2008). We operationalize societal engagement in this mode as invitation and contracting. Both network and market governance are suitable for enabling societal actors to negotiate their own financial or other interests.

Self-governance, in which authorities give social actors the maximum space to reach their own goals, is a governance mode that emphasizes societal initiative. In this form of governance, the government is responsive to societal initiative and explores ways to connect its own goals with the societal energy outside the government (Hajer, 2011; Van der Steen et al., 2015). Societal engagement can be characterized by initiative and (self-)creation. Network- and self-governance modes are useful for moving beyond the governmental and 'scientific' arguments. The emergence of these governance modes is not a matter of transition from one mode to another. It does not mean the end of public governance, but merely results in mixed perspectives (Van der Steen et al., 2015).

The setting in which policies for Natura 2000 are developed reflect trends of increasing complexity of actors, scales and decision-making modes in various policy domains (Niedziałkowski et al., 2015). Policies for societal engagement are interwoven in the local and regional context of the areas, in which histories, earlier conflicts and a web of other policy frameworks at the national, regional and European levels play a role. In the cases, we examine the contextual factors which influence the development of these policies. To analyse how policies for societal engagement are operationalized and to unravel the modes of societal engagement in more detail, we make use of some clearly defined elements of policy: storylines, instruments, organization and interaction style (adapted from Liefferink and Jordan, 2004).

Storylines refer to the shared concepts which mobilize or galvanize people into action (Bate, 2004; Rein and Schön, 1996; Hajer and Laws, 2008). Van der Stoep (2014) shows that storylines are an important way for governments to communicate with citizens when they want them to connect with a government agenda (and vice versa). In each government strategy or area policy, storylines are substantive and context related. They can provide an indication of a mode of societal engagement based on the concepts they contain, for example by referring to public goods (hierarchical government), shared goals (network governance), market values (market governance) or self-reliance (self-governance).

Instruments can be defined as tools to implement a policy. Although in reality instruments are often multifaceted, making them more or less compatible with other governance modes, instruments are often closely connected to a specific governance

Table 3
Comparison of core features of the areas (adapted Kamphorst et al., 2015; * Eurostat, 2016 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI).

Societal involvement Natura 2000	Naturpark Aukrug, Schleswig-Holstein; Germany	Exmoor National Park, England	Lille Vildmose, Denmark
Short description	Local organization is in charge of management plans for Natura 2000, involving landowners.	The park created a multi-stakeholder management plan and co-finances local initiatives.	Collaborative process in order to achieve support for nature protection.
Scale of the site	The area in which the organization is active is approx. 380 km^2. The total area of the Natura 2000 sites is 10 km^2.	The National Park covers 693 km^2. It includes two Natura 2000 sites that cover approximately 126 km^2.	At 76 km^2 Denmark's largest protected land area. Almost all of the park is designated as Natura 2000.
Type of landscape	Mixed agricultural forest landscape.	Moorland, woodland, valleys, farmland.	Moorland and woodland.
Type of land ownership	Private ownership (landowners and NGOs).	Mixed ownership (three-quarters of the area is privately owned, including many farmers).	Mixed ownership (primary owner is a private fund for nature conservation).
Habitats protected under EU legislation	Bogs grasslands, heathland streams, lakes, forests.	Bogs & fens, forest, heathland, vegetated cliffs.	Bogs, forests, grasslands, inland dunes.
GDP of NUTS area (L2)in which site is located (100 = EU average) in 2014 *	104	90	112
Population density of NUTS area (L2) in which site is located *[a]	178.7	213.2	98.2

[a] NUTS Level 2 regions have been selected as the data are comparable (both in time period as well as in calculation method). A disadvantage is that the data cover a much larger region than just the Natura 2000 site: Dorset and Somerset, Syddanmark, Schleswig Holsteijn.

mode (Salamon, 2002; Würzel et al., 2013). As the Habitats Directive itself sets a rather unifying regulatory framework for the Natura 2000 sites, the review in the area cases focused in particular on the use of financial and information instruments (based on Salamon, 2002). Some of the financial instruments are compatible and used in several modes, such as subsidies, but in each mode they have a different character. In hierarchical governance modes, financial instruments are predominantly one-sided, such as taxes. In network governance, targeted subsidies and public-private partnerships are developed in close consultation with recipient groups. In market governance, financial instruments have the character of contracts, and in self-governance modes, government may provide start-up funding for societal initiatives. Likewise, communicative instruments differ in each governance mode. Whereas public meetings and brochures are among the main instruments used in a hierarchical mode, instruments such as negotiation and round table meetings are more suited to market governance, dialogues are more associated with network governance, and individual coaching and self-assessment tools are more appropriate for self-governance.

With regard to the *organizational structure* for the cases, we refer to the type of local policy organization in the areas. We indicate the mechanism by which the policy is developed and implemented with public and/or private actors: whether it is carried out mainly by public actors, contracted societal actors or partnerships, or mainly by inviting citizens and communities to take responsibility.

Finally, the policies can be characterized by *style of interaction*, defined as the formal and informal attitudes with which societal actors and authorities cooperate. In general, hierarchical governance is associated with formal interaction. Market governance is also characterized by formal interaction, but it is enforced by contracts. In network governance, emphasis is given to informal and frequent contacts between actors, enforced by mutual agreements. In self-governance, informal contacts also dominate and enforcement is based on choice. In the latter two modes, however, there is less enforcement. Würzel et al. (2013) show how different governance forms and related instruments often coexist, but can also give rise to new instruments with a more hybrid character. In practice, therefore, different elements can be employed in different ways in each mode.

4. Case selection

This research was carried out using a case study design. Natura 2000 was chosen as an overarching case for a policy field in which governments face challenges regarding active societal engagement within a regulatory setting. As there are over 27,000 Natura 2000 sites in Europe, selecting areas for an analysis of societal involvement was challenging. Selecting the best practices was not an option. We aimed for areas in which societal engagement was an issue both locally and nationally. The areas were selected by carrying out a quick scan of Natura 2000 areas where societal engagement was an explicit issue in 2013. The selection was based on an internet scan for documentation on Natura 2000 sites and analysing these documents to identify where societal engagement was explicitly mentioned, coupled with a joint expert assessment with the Eurosite and Europarc Federation[2] network. Three areas with both national or regional policies on societal engagement were selected: Exmoor National Park (England, UK), Lille Vildmose (Denmark) and Naturpark Aukrug (in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany). Core features of the areas, such as scale of the site, type of landscape and protected habitats, type of land ownership, GDP and population density are compared in Table 3.

The research into the cases consisted of the document analysis and interviews with 5 to 12 respondents (face-to-face, telephone and group interviews). The questionnaire focused on the type of societal engagement and the perceptions of actors on the involvement in the case. The policies of the three areas were classified according to the elements in our analytical framework to enable a comparison of the three areas and to study the extent to which the policies provide for societal engagement that meets the motivations of individuals and groups in society to be involved.

Table 3 shows the similarities and differences between the areas. In all areas, land ownership is mixed, although the type of private owners differs between the cases. In Lille Vildmose the main private owner is a nature conservation organization, while in Exmoor there are many farms within the boundary of the park. The areas contain

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[2] Eurosite and Europarc Federation are European network organizations of protected area managers.

similar types of protected habitats, such as bogs and heathland. The biggest differences relate to the size of the area studies as well as the general economic situation of the surrounding areas. Lille Vildmose is the smallest area in terms of size, but the largest in terms of the area protected under Natura 2000. In both Aukrug and Exmoor, the authorities are active in areas outside the Natura 2000 sites; their policies cover Natura 2000 sites and their surroundings. The GDP is the highest in the NUTS region in which Lille Vildmose is located, and lowest in Exmoor.

5. Results of the area cases

5.1. Societal engagement in Exmoor National Park, England

Exmoor National Park in England covers 693 km^2 of moorland, woodland, valleys and farmland. Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954. Two Natura 2000 sites are located within its boundaries: Exmoor Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods SAC. The National Park is located within the boundaries of two counties: Somerset (71%) and Devon (29%). About three-quarters of the land is privately owned and many of these owners are farmers. About half of Exmoor's population live in small towns and villages and the remainder live in isolated farms and hamlets (Lichfield and Partners, 2009). Exmoor is a sparse rural area, which largely explains the main socioeconomic issues in the area. Tourism, agriculture, hunting and forestry together make up almost one-third of employment within the National Park. They are drivers of the economy and an important source of jobs (Lichfield and Partners, 2009).

The Exmoor National Park Authority was established in 1997. Its remit is not just nature conservation, but includes a wider range of priority actions relating to engaging people, visitors, access and supporting local initiatives that help to meet local needs and entrepreneurship. In England, the government's 'big society' initiative and the tendency to cut back on public spending on nature conservation influence the policies for the area. The National Parks Authority faces the challenge of finding societal finance and involving communities and landowners more than before for their work in the area.

The designation and management of the Natura 2000 sites in England is implemented through the existing national protected area system of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), a responsibility of Natural England, an executive non-departmental public body funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. Since Natura 2000 imposed no additional requirements on individual landowners in Exmoor, no extra consultation was considered necessary. Respondents reported resistance from landowners and farmers concerning restrictions on the use of their land. Others, however, are pleased to receive agri-environment scheme funding that compensates them to some degree for their reduced farming income.

Some interviewees said that the National Park Authority experienced problems in gaining public support for their policies because people felt that policies were being imposed on them. The Authority seeks societal support for its policies by activating societal actors. An important argument for societal engagement used by the Authority is to widen responsibility for the park. In 2012 the Authority published its Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan, a management plan for the park. Creating the plan was an interactive process. Partly driven by reductions in public expenditure, there was a need to combine public and private efforts and resources and societal engagement is therefore a main theme of the Partnership Plan. The plan identifies three priorities for partnership action: 'a thriving landscape', 'connecting people and places' and 'towards a sustainable future' (Exmoor National Park, 2012a, 2012b). The

storyline is that the partners share the responsibility for keeping Exmoor National Park special and that together they meet the needs and wellbeing of local communities. Respondents indicate that Natura 2000 is not explicitly mentioned in communication to the wider public. A Habitat Regulations assessment was carried out to determine the likely consequences of the partnership plan on the Natura 2000 sites and the plan was amended accordingly (Exmoor National Park, 2012a).

The main instrument for increasing societal engagement is seed funding and public-private financing of projects in the park. The National Park Partnership Fund, which is a grant funding programme provided by the National Park Authority, co-funds projects that contribute to the goals of the National Park. Nature conservation partners, such as RSPB, who carry out nature conservation work, also have to bid for funds and attract different sources of finance for nature conservation. On the other hand, the fund provides public finance for a range of societal projects. Projects are selected that add to community values and economic development in the region, such as local tourism activities and transport for the elderly and disabled in the region (National Parks Authority, 2014). Another project providing economic benefit is collective management of woodland, which provides wood as an alternative energy source.

The local organization can be characterized as partnership- and contract-based: the authority develops and carries out policy in partnership with local councils, other public sector organizations, businesses and societal actors. The style of interaction is formalized in strategic partnership groups, which include a wide array of actors, formed around different themes. They develop project proposals and submit bids for funding to the partnership fund. Staff at the National Park Authority are employed to guide the strategic partnership groups. The idea is that the National Park Authority helps communities to deliver their own goals, instead of imposing policies on the population or by executing the work by itself.

Natural England coordinates efforts and management measures to achieve the conservation objectives in both the Natura 2000 sites, such as engaging landowners to bring woodlands into positive management and establishing more agri-environment schemes. The societal engagement organized and facilitated by the partnership fund exceeds these processes as it covers a larger area than the Natura 2000 sites.

5.2. Societal engagement in Aukrug, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

Naturpark Aukrug is located in the middle of Schleswig-Holstein, about 30 km north of Hamburg, in two counties (Kreise), Rendsburg-Eckernförde and Steinburg. It was established in 1998 and is approximately 380 km^2 in size. The Naturpark contains nine Natura 2000 sites, which consist of forest with remnants of heathlands or streams and their banks (Auen).

Management plans have been prepared for all the Natura 2000 sites in Schleswig-Holstein. Most of the management plans were prepared by the Landesamtes für Landwirtschaft Umwelt und ländliche Räume (LLUR). However, Schleswig-Holstein is experimenting with setting up Lokale Aktionsgruppe (Ambstblatt, 2007), local organizations responsible for preparing management plans for Natura 2000 sites and ensuring adequate management. At the moment there are eight different Lokale Aktionsgruppe. The character of these groups is very diverse, from local NGOs to water boards responsible for management of specific areas. One of the Lokale Aktionsgruppe is established in Naturpark Aukrug (Boller et al., 2013).

There are two important organizations active in the Naturpark. The first, the NGO Naturschutzring Aukruge, was founded in 2001 to establish successful nature projects together with the local people and has been given the responsibility for drafting the Natura 2000

Table 4
Comparison of the main elements of the societal engagement policies for the areas.

Societal involvement Natura 2000	Exmoor National Park, England	Naturpark Aukrug, Schleswig-Holstein	Lille Vildmose, Denmark
Storylines	Meeting the needs of activated communities, economic developed and a thriving landscape as a shared responsibility.	Shared ownership; local people are responsible for nature management; mutual interest.	Area is wonderful pearl of nature, which stakeholders should accept; nature restoration can bring economic benefits.
Main instruments	Seed money and public private finance of projects for the park.	Tailor-made agri-environment schemes.	Information and collaboration.
Organizational structure	Single purpose authority works in partnership with societal partners; partnership- and contract-based organization.	Membership organization in charge of management plan; shares management; partnership- and contract-based organization.	Public-private partnership in charge of nature restoration; partnership- and contract-based organization.
Style of interaction	Formalized; strategic partnership groups; societal partners are delivery partners.	Informal cooperation, trust building.	Public meetings and kitchen table talks; business relations.

management plans in the area. To further formalize the cooperation between the municipalities in the Naturpark, the Naturpark Aukrug E.V. association was established in 2011; currently 27 municipalities are members. The municipalities cooperate on improving tourism, nature conservation and protection of the cultural landscape in the Naturpark. Tourism operators have also established an association to promote the region and their businesses.

The regional strategy in Schleswig-Holstein of delegating Natura 2000 management planning to *Lokale Actionsgruppe* aims to gain acceptance for nature conservation designations and to deal with earlier conflicts (Boller et al., 2013). Also, the regional governments (*Kreise*) stress that the presence of a local contact person is essential for avoiding or defusing conflicts as these people are trusted. Avoidance of conflicts and ensuring adequate management of the whole Naturpark are important arguments for the government to seek societal involvement. This is reflected in the main storyline of Naturschutzring (NSR) Aukrug and Naturpark Aukrug, that local residents are responsible for nature conservation and that the best results are achieved if cooperation is sought between the different parties. Wherever possible, nature conservation activities should be voluntary, including measures by landowners and land acquisition. The various people interviewed gave their own variation of this theme, depending on their own motivation. A core concept in the storyline is mutual interest and that what is needed is adequate management through shared ownership. The main arguments given for societal engagement in the area seem to be normative as well as instrumental.

NSR Aukrug has different means to increase societal engagement in Naturpark and the management of the area: educational public meetings (walks, talks) to inform the general public about the area and bilateral meetings with landowners to discuss options for nature conservation on their land. In addition, everyone can become a member of NSR Aukrug or become involved in their activities. This approach was also reflected in the management planning process for the different Natura 2000 plans developed by NSR Aukrug. For some of the management plans only bilateral talks with owners were organized to discuss management options – no large meetings were held. For other management plans, larger meetings were held (approximately 30 people) with follow-up discussions with owners. Overall, the preferred approach was to include measures in the plans that were achievable and for which support was ensured.

In Naturpark Aukrug a variety of different financial instruments are used to achieve conservation. First, NSR Aukrug itself is co-funded by the national government, the regional government and the private foundation Kurt und Erica Schrobach Stiftung. Second, tailor-made agri-environmental schemes are available for the

region in addition to the existing regional schemes of Schleswig Holsteijn. The schemes operating in Naturpark Aukrug are more flexible than the regional schemes and offer landowners more opportunities for incorporating them into their businesses. Third, funds from regional and private organizations are used to acquire land. The pasture land in the stream valleys owned by the foundations are leased by local farmers and the new associations VERNA and ERNA. These instruments link the motivations of societal and government actors: they find shared goals by enabling landowners to undertake conservation management activities compatible with their businesses, thereby compensating landowners for their contributions. The policy organization can be characterized as partnership- and contract-based. The interaction style is both anticipatory and consensus seeking. Many of the actors involved are connected to NSR Aukrug and know each other well and meet frequently, both formally and informally, and in the interviews they stressed that they have constructive working relationships. In Aukrug, therefore, the policy leads not only to participation by landowners in land use, but also supports social cohesion and conflict diffusion.

5.3. Societal engagement in Lille Vildmose, Denmark

Lille Vildmose in East Himmerland is Denmark's largest protected land area (76 km^2) and has been a Natura 2000 site since 1998. Lille Vildmose has North-West Europe's largest raised bog, unique natural and grazed forests, and cultural and historical values relating to the peat extraction that used to be an important source of employment. The area is located close to the city of Aalborg. The primary and biggest landowner is Aage V. Jensen Nature Foundation, a private foundation whose main interest is nature conservation.

Since 2007, the Danish government has published guidelines for Natura 2000 plans (By og landskabsstyrelsen, 2007; Lund and Holbeck, 2009; Ministry of Environment, 2011). At that time, the government stressed that Denmark had never before faced plans for nature conservation on such a scale. The main regulations on nature conservation are laid down by central government. For the Natura 2000 management plans for 2016–2021 it was decided to stress the importance of dialogue between public and private stakeholders and collaborate on implementation. Respondents in our study stated that in Lille Vildmose there has been stakeholder engagement and collaboration from the beginning. The area has its own organization and process, with its own communication and dialogue.

The organizational structure is a public-private partnership consisting of Aage V. Jensen Nature Foundation, the Municipality of Aalborg and Nature Agency Denmark. Together, they carry out the

Table 5
Arguments for societal engagement in the areas.

Arguments	Governments' arguments	Society's arguments
Exmoor	Mostly instrumental and substantive: society contributes finance to support the purposes of the park including biodiversity	Mostly substantive: societal actors participate with their own goals; and normative: allowing active engagement of societal partners and citizens
Aukrug	Mostly instrumental and normative: societal contributions to nature conservation to ensure public support	Mostly instrumental: societal actors receive rewards for management contributions
Lille Vildmose	Mostly normative: finding acceptance for nature goals	Mostly instrumental: societal actors receive compensation for income losses (farmers)

daily management and habitat restoration works as well as an extensive restoration project in the raised bog (LIFE+, 2011–2016). Societal actors are represented in an Advisory Board, a Followers Group for local people, NGOs and farmers, and a Board of Supervisors. Private actors are also important and the big peat company Pindstrup Mosebrug is a member of the day-to-day management group. Many people (including locals) have been recruited as ambassadors for the area.

The storyline in Lille Vildmose is built around the image of the area as full of historical interest and a paradise for nature lovers. The partners are working actively on branding the Lille Vildmose as a 'pearl of natural beauty' and nature as a source of wellbeing that also contributes to the economy. But the partners emphasize that the nature protection policy is here to stay. Everyone must accept that and act accordingly. It is a 'no way back' strategy. In the past, the EU had criticized the lack of protection, which prompted a more comprehensive approach and led to the application for a Life+ project in 2010. The Life+ project is a public-private nature conservation initiative that aims to overcome societal resistance and balance competing interests, such as those of farmers (Snethlage et al., 2012; Nature Agency, 2010). There has been resistance from some small farmers and landowners, who represent a small portion of the land in the area and seven agrarian landowners are taking legal action. Their main concern is that their rights and farming activities are restricted, and as a consequence they have lost income and their property has lost value, while the compensation scheme is insufficient. This was one of the reasons for the partners to make communication a core instrument and it became an in-depth information campaign for the duration of the project. The approach includes efforts to create better economic conditions. An essential component of the work of the project partners are the habitat restoration works. They also use these to increase the level of support by creating jobs through contracts with local businesses. A problem here is that the larger projects have to be put out to tender. Local NGOs are also engaged in nature management tasks. The policy organization can be characterized as partnership- and contract-based.

In order to bridge differences, the partners are conducting informal kitchen table meetings between partners and farmers (landowners). Face-to-face talks are used to keep the communication going and larger, formal meetings follow these more informal meetings. The interaction style can be characterized as a mixture of formal and informal interactions. Although time-consuming, this work is viewed as necessary for creating a joint framing of problems and solutions. Another important aspect of the strategy is providing information and education on the value of the wildlife and natural habitats to tourists and visitors at the Lille Vildmose Visitor Centre. The centre is supported by about 25 local sponsors. The aim is to give everybody the information they require and the partners strive for a shared storyline based on the positive values of Lille Vildmose.

Increasingly, local agricultural products are being given a Lille Vildmose brand, such as the Vildmose potatoes, although these come from the neighbouring Store Vildmose. The Pindstrup company has also picked up on this strategy of product and area branding. Pindstrup has just a small area inside and on the edge of the Natura 2000 area, but wants to stay there and work for a sustainable peat extraction. In all the major restoration works, people are offered opportunities to engage themselves in the work or provide input. However, the partners realize that engagement must be matched by facilities and a plan that enable the partners to manage the expectations involved.

The biggest challenge in Lille Vildmose is the protesting farmers. The expectation put forward by the respondents from the partnership organization is that the farmers will gradually move towards the positive storyline as their opportunities to claim compensation become exhausted.

6. Comparative analysis

In this section we address the following questions: What types of policies for societal engagement are the authorities developing? How do these relate to the regulatory framework of Natura 2000 and the specific context of the areas? and How do the policies balance government perspectives for societal engagement with the arguments of social actors to get involved in these areas?

We studied three different policies for societal engagement that have developed in different policy contexts and backgrounds within each of the countries and regions involved. In all cases, the regulatory framework for Natura 2000 applies. The provisions of the directives have been translated into national laws by the Member States. Responsible authorities are obliged to assess activities in the areas that may conflict with the conservation status of the species and habitats that the sites have been designated for (Habitat Assessment; Council Directive 92/43/EEC). The objective of protecting the relevant habitats and species in the areas are central and require a process to establish restoration and management measures for those species. In all area cases in this study, the designations, or the fact that the designations require changes in the use of privately owned land, has led to resistance from these landowners. In all cases, overcoming this resistance is part of the reason why the government authorities have sought to develop a more societal approach, which has to be reconciled with the regulatory framework for Natura 2000.

In Exmoor, the context is a mixed land ownership, with the presence of towns and villages in the park and socioeconomic challenges in the area. The jurisdiction of the National Park Authority covers a large area, in which the two Natura 2000 sites play a modest role in terms of scale. This allows the National Parks Authority to address societal engagement on a wider scale than Natura 2000 site management and to address economic development, commu-

nity work and nature conservation at the same time. The process of arranging management and other needed measures for both Natura 2000 areas continues alongside the bottom up strategy.

In Schleswig-Holstein, the response to conflicts over Natura 2000 designations has been to establish pilot projects in which local organizations are responsible for creating management plans, as in Aukrug. The area has a mixed ownership and management depends to a great extent on local landowners, but the area of the Natura 2000 sites is limited. Involving landowners in nature management is at the centre of the strategy.

In Lille Vildmose, most of the area is owned by one private nature fund and almost all of the park has a Natura 2000 designation. Nature protection is at the centre of the strategy, but the resistance of the few farmers located at the edges of the park is a core motive to start a more interactive dialogue.

These backgrounds lead to the development of different modes of societal engagement. In Lille Vilmose the strategy mostly resembles hierarchical governance with elements of market governance and network governance, with a focus on public support for the nature designations through compensation and dialogue. The arguments for nature conservation and the corresponding societal engagement are mostly 'government driven' and normative, that is, to strive for acceptance of the nature designations. The presence of a private funding organization collaborating with the government shows that network governance also plays an important role. Contracting local businesses is being used as an additional way to find shared goals and move towards coproduction, which indicates market-oriented elements in the policy.

Aukrug's strategy is one in which societal actors contribute to nature management of the area and the Natura 2000 goals and can be classified as being dominated by network governance with elements of market governance. The arguments of the authority that dominates the policy are mostly instrumental and to a lesser extent normative: a wish to activate landowners for management and to ensure their support, in line with the ecological emphasis of the Natura 2000 framework. Personal contact through the presence of a manager of NSR is central in achieving societal involvement. A core instrument is the use of adapted agri-management schemes that are easier to incorporate into farm management. The government-driven motivation to use landowners for management is mixed with ways to make the instruments an attractive contribution, add to local pride and responsibility.

Exmoor's policy for societal engagement is mostly based on network governance with elements of self-governance and market governance. Societal contributions are sought to supplement the ecological work of professionals, and ecological work is no longer only financed with government money. The responsiveness of the National Park Authority to societal initiatives is a core element of the strategy and seed money from the partnership fund allows societal actors to bring in their own ideas. The storyline of the authority is to share the responsibility for the park with societal actors and activate them as delivery partners, which indicates a market approach. This is a way to combine the government's instrumental wish to attract societal finance to the area with the motivation of societal actors to take their own initiatives and achieve wider benefits for the area (Table 4).

The societal engagement in our cases is less government driven than expected from the literature review (Section 2). The authorities do indeed strive for acceptance of nature conservation designations and they aim to attract finance from society to achieve ecological goals. However, the cases also indicate the extent to which the policies meet the motives of societal actors to get involved. The policies address several societal motives for engagement, such as the inclusion of wider societal values, compensating landowners for income losses and inviting societal initiatives.

In our cases, both storylines and instruments are used to balance the perspectives of governments and society in relation to societal engagement and what this engagement implies. For example, normative arguments of governments (*achieving acceptance of nature designations*) are combined with society's instrumental arguments (*we want to be rewarded for our contributions*) by adapting subsidies to local circumstances. Instrumental arguments of governments (*societal engagement should contribute to policy outcomes*) are combined with society's instrumental or normative arguments (*we want to be active and rewarded for our own initiative*) by outsourcing or by setting the obligation to finance each proposal with combined public and private finance. In addition, the normative and substantive motives of society (*we want to be active with our own values and initiatives*) are combined with normative arguments of governments (*acceptance of nature designations*) by establishing financial instruments, such as seed money, and an inviting storyline.

Table 5 presents the arguments for societal engagement used in the areas.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The key question in this article was what kind of policies authorities develop for societal engagement in Natura 2000 areas and to what extent these policies respond to societal motives for being involved. We also explored how the aim of improving societal engagement is reconciled with the regulatory character of Natura 2000. We examined this in a qualitative study of government policies to improve societal engagement in Natura 2000 sites and their surroundings in three cases: Exmoor National Park (England, UK), Lille Vildmose (Denmark), and Nature Park Aukrug (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany).

The authorities in the three case areas have the explicit wish to increase societal involvement, but nature conservation and the Natura 2000 objectives are far from an entirely societal affair. In all three cases, governments largely retained their roles of coordination and setting goals, either explicitly or implicitly. Despite similar ambitions, the strategies adopted reflect different emphases in approach, as seen through the analytic lens of dominant governance modes. Our cases show that current modes for societal engagement are presently mixed. As was suggested in our perspective on the emergence of governance modes, new styles emerge, while the regulatory framework of Natura 2000 still plays a role.

The designations and the possible restrictions on land use have led to conflicts with landowners. The need to resolve these conflicts is a motive for governments to seek more societal engagement in the implementation of Natura 2000, which is consistent with other research (Geitzenauer et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013; Boller et al., 2013; Ferranti et al., 2014).

The conflicts still play a role in the three areas, although their intensity differs, as do the strategies for involving societal actors. Authorities combine the aim of gaining societal acceptance of nature designations with the implementation of distinct strategies that are also responsive to motives for individuals and groups in society to get involved in the management of the areas. This ranges from funding public support for nature designations through compensation and dialogue (Lille Vildmose), to involving landowners by underlining shared responsibility and the presence of a local broker and flexible agri-environmental schemes (Aukrug), to inviting societal projects that stimulate the economy and include societal values in addition to nature conservation (Exmoor). This finding confirms what Turnhout et al. (2015) saw as a shift from a technocratic discourse in the design stage to a more participative approach in the implementation stage. Our findings also confirm that societal engagement is often about engaging relevant landowners and users, but also that the focus is gradually shifting to

a broader engagement (Beunen and de Vries, 2011). As concluded by Turnhout et al. (2015), this engagement often serves economic purposes, but is also about the ability to integrate economic, environmental, and social concerns, and to realize multiple wins. In our cases, we found a growing awareness of a need for broadening the societal engagement.

Government strategies for societal involvement require a reconsideration of the strategies in terms of storylines, instruments and styles of interaction. To promote societal inclusiveness in nature conservation requires the limitation or downplaying of the technical story about nature conservation rules and regulations and developing a storyline that presents a wider scope of the Natura 2000 area and its surroundings, including economic interests, leisure, place identity and other societal goals. However, this also depends on the size of the Natura 2000 area. The development of such an wider storyline is easier where the Natura 2000 sites are part of a much larger area that has a local identity.

In terms of financial instruments, different approaches can be sought. One approach could include efforts to provide flexibility in funding mechanisms, in particular agri-environmental schemes. In our cases, the provision of flexibility in the duration of contracts and type of measures in agri-environmental schemes works as a mechanism for getting local landowners involved, which has also been pointed out by Borrass (2014). Another, more far-reaching, approach is to set up funding mechanisms that enable a broad range of projects to be funded or to contract local businesses.

Inviting communities and landowners to deliver their own initiatives, instead of authorities imposing policy on actors, helps to shift the responsibility more towards society. The presence of informal contacts between professionals and societal actors is essential for building trust and for triggering societal engagement in decision making and management of Natura 2000 sites. Beunen and Vries (2011) also underlined the importance of trust in the process of management (planning) of Natura 2000 sites. We found that both formal and informal interactions are needed, a finding that has also been reported by Borrass (2014). In areas where conflict occurred or the implementation of measures is proving difficult, local brokers or informal dialogue, such as kitchen table talks, can play an important role.

A lesson from our cases is the usefulness of working deliberately to overcome tensions between the regulatory character of the Natura 2000 framework, with its focus on ecology and its legally binding regulations, and increasing societal engagement – particularly if an authority develops tools and instruments to help generate societal projects and bottom-up initiatives.

Including societal perspectives on societal engagement in this study allowed us to analyse whether policies for societal engagement exceed the common interpretation of societal engagement in Natura 2000, which is acceptance of the designations. Explicitly analysing the processes in Natura 2000 sites through the analytic lens of governance modes employed, the associated storylines, instruments used, organizational structure and styles of interaction shed light on strategies that meet demands for engagement among individuals and groups in society and can be employed by government authorities to increase societal engagement in Natura 2000 areas. It is, however, of paramount importance to look closely at the ways the strategies interact with local, regional and national conditions, as matters of ownership, socioeconomics, and natural and cultural characteristics of the areas in question are important for how the strategy works.

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