

Partnerships in Working with Natural Processes schemes in the UK: Identifying factors that impact and shape success



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

JBA
trust

JBA
consulting

The recent paradigm shift away from traditional flood defence to more holistic approaches such as natural flood management (NFM) and Working with Natural Processes (WWNP), defined by the Environment Agency (EA) as “*taking action to manage fluvial and coastal flood and coastal erosion risk by protecting, restoring and emulating the natural regulating function of catchments, rivers, floodplains and coasts*”, has stimulated a discussion about how such measures can be successfully implemented. Partnerships are increasingly seen as a necessary method of tackling complex, multi-level and multi-scalar problems, such as flooding. This study explored partnership working in WWNP schemes, focusing on the factors that impact and shape success.

August 2017

Aim

Identify the drivers, enablers and barriers to building successful partnerships in NFM schemes in the UK.

Objectives

- Identify and analyse the drivers & motivation in the creation of partnership arrangements in NFM and assess what enables a partnership to be established
- Identify and analyse factors that may challenge or enable a partnership's success
- Develop recommendations of best practice for implementing and delivering successful WWNP partnerships.



Holnicote Estate in Exmoor, Somerset. Credit: Nigel Hester/National Trust



Methodology

This project demanded a research strategy that would facilitate an in-depth study of a contemporary issue and obtain different stakeholder perspectives, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a topic area that is currently lacking in empirical evidence.

The following qualitative methods were employed:

- Case study approach
- Semi-structured interviews
- Online survey

65 case studies from the EA's WWNP evidence base were analysed and using the selection criteria in the box on the left, 10 case studies were identified:

Alkborough Flats, Belford, Blackbrook, Haltwhistle, Haweswater, Hesketh Out Marsh East, Holnicote, Medmerry, Pickering, Stroud Rural SuDS

A survey was then used to check the extent to which the findings from the interviews pervaded across the remaining 55 case studies.

Selection criteria for case studies

- Minimum of 1 NFM measure
- NFM measures have been recognised by some form of independent award
- Minimum of 2 partner organisations in the partnership
- Flood and coastal erosion risk management is an aim of the scheme

Partnerships in Working with Natural Processes schemes in the UK: Identifying factors that impact and shape success

The findings of this research suggest that the extent to which factors are barriers or enablers to the initiation or success of a partnership is heavily context dependent. Consequently, creating a set of best-practice guidelines is problematic. However, some common themes have been identified that will provide valuable guidance for the future.



Artificial pool at Holnicote Estate, Exmoor. Credit: Nigel Hester/ National Trust



Timber bund at Pickering. Credit: Institution of Civil Engineers



Medmerry Coastal Managed Realignment Scheme. Credit: Discover Britain Magazine

Local communities, landownership and the evidence gap are examples of factors that can both drive a partnership and act as a barrier, depending upon context and proximity.

Other factors that drive and enable the creation of partnerships are project champions; pre-existing relationships between partner organisations; a common vision; local organisations, authorities and democratically-elected project officials; the use of trial catchments; and the role of neutral agents such as NGOs and academic institutions.

In addition, during a partnership, the use of local knowledge, governance structures and a common vision between partners further contribute to the success of the project overall.



Woody debris dam, Stroud Rural Sustainable Drainage Systems scheme. Credit: Stroud.gov.uk

Whilst it is important to consider the local context and this guidance is by no means universally applicable, it is hoped that by drawing awareness to the experiences of previous partnerships, future partnerships may learn from both their mistakes and successes to contribute towards their own success.