

What are citizens' attitudes towards management of the countryside and grasslands in particular, and how can this inform policy?

Objective: To explore citizen priorities and preferences for ecosystems services (ES) in relation to PG and policies associated with the preservation and management of PG.

Methodology: A total of 15 focus groups (including 104 individuals from urban and rural areas) were conducted in 5 EU countries (UK, Spain, Sweden, Czech Republic, Switzerland) representing 5 biogeographic regions. Thematic analysis and Nvivo were used to analyse the focus group transcripts.

Key Results:

- Participants' opinions on the benefits of grassland could most often be categorised as ES associated with providing habitats for wild plants and animals, followed by cultural ES of sport, recreation and leisure. However, those living in the rural areas perceived more varied bundles of benefits from grassland than those living in urban areas.
- Citizens articulated three types of problems: i) conversion of grassland to urban land use or cropland, or reduction of access to grassland; ii) degradation of grassland; and iii) abandonment of grassland (lack of management). In all five case study areas, threats to biodiversity was mentioned as a consequence and a need for grassland to be present and well managed to provide valuable biodiversity.
- In terms of how citizens would like to improve grassland landscapes, five themes were identified (education, rules, farming ideals, economics, social pressure), the most common being education. Participants assumed that more information provision through education would lead to decisions that favoured buying local products that were sustainably produced.

Policy Implications: The implications of this research are that as agricultural landscapes are continually contested, a better understanding of citizen perspectives may lead to better conceptualisation of how and when mismatches in (perceptions of) ES supply and demand (including relational values) occur. It may allow better communication between stakeholder groups, including citizens, farmers and policy makers, particularly if shared ideals or (social-ecological) systems understandings can be incorporated into deliberations or decision-making processes.

Changing policy would also need to address people's interconnected identities as citizens and consumers, facilitating regionally-specific connection and attachment to grasslands through education, shared ideals, and discourses, emphasising the multiple values of grassland at a local and landscape scale, which may help improve pro-environmental behaviour, in order to facilitate transition to sustainable grassland systems.

The scale and quality of ES provided by PG in Europe continues to decline and better evidence on effective responses is needed urgently.

Key Reference: Tindale, S., Vicario-Modroño, V., Gallardo-Cobos, R., Hunter, E., Miškolci, S., Price, P. N., ... & Frewer, L. J. (2023). Citizen perceptions and values associated with ecosystem services from European grassland landscapes. *Land Use Policy*, 127, 106574.