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From sponsor to partner: NGO–business alliances that support nature conservation in the Netherlands

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Recent developments in the Netherlands have encouraged a shift in the focus of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from maintaining links with the public sector towards forging new links with private actors. Although businesses increasingly shape society, their potential contribution to nature conservation has not been fully explored. This article outlines the incentives for collaboration between businesses and nature organisations at regional and national levels. This study is based on interviews held with business representatives and fund-raising officers. The results show that the limited awareness of one's own identity is a hindrance to the development of alliances from a sponsor into a partner relation. Nature organisations are unable to recognise their appealing aspects for businesses, while businesses are not always outspoken about their desired societal role. Further, businesses at regional and national levels differ in their motivation for collaboration with NGOs. To improve the collaboration, each party has to identify which resources they can offer in a relationship, and what they would like to gain in return.

Keywords: businesses; non-governmental organisations; CSR; collaboration; nature conservation

1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, the contribution of businesses to nature conservation has become an issue of increasing interest. In a country where the critical financial status of the government has led to cutbacks on subsidies for nature conservation, attention has turned towards cross-sector alliances to meet the shortfall. Simultaneously, nature and landscape organisations have to rethink their conservation and communication strategies. Despite the large number of citizens who support them as members, the organisations have been mainly occupied with the conservation of biodiversity objectives set by governmental policies. Currently, as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) they have to broaden their horizons to meet a more diverse societal and market demand. These trends require nature and landscape organisations to adopt an entrepreneurial approach in which they do not only collaborate with governments (public-NGO alliances), but where they are also challenged to incorporate the visions of civil society.

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The increasing cooperation with businesses (private-NGO alliances) did not only result from the changing priorities of government (Hupperts and Van Leenders 2003; Maessen et al. 2005), but also by a change in mentality. Initially, NGOs considered businesses as causes of environmental problems (Nijhof et al. 2007), while nowadays, they also recognise their potential to have an invaluable positive impact on society. Previously, NGOs were mainly concerned with using an opposing approach, which was aimed at raising awareness of the social and ecological impacts of businesses. Nowadays, they often communicate and speak directly to businesses about their responsibilities. Therefore, NGOs and private organisations can be cooperative, and can also involve speaking out against their activities, either directly or indirectly, as well.

Although alliances between international corporations and environmental NGOs have received substantive attention (e.g. Seitanidi 2010; Van Huijstee 2010), little is known about how these alliances have been developed at the regional level. From the increasing importance of the regional identity in which nature and landscape play an important role, it may be expected that the attention for these alliances will grow. Given the trend to decentralise nature conservation policies and its budgets, more collaboration between environmental NGOs with businesses and municipalities becomes necessary to realise nature and landscape projects. This leads us to such questions as: do national and regional businesses and NGOs have the same motives to collaborate as their international counterparts, and to what extent are they able and willing to develop a partnership?

The purpose of this article is to respond to this knowledge gap and to give a richer understanding and theoretical perception of the potential role of these national and regional collaborations. This requires an understanding of the incentives for and development of these relationships. An important question is whether NGOs and businesses do not only exchange financial resources, but are also able to cooperate as partners in joint projects. Therefore, with the help of a theoretical framework, we will evaluate the current national and regional collaborations. We will first outline the development of alliances between nature organisations and businesses (section 2). Subsequently, we will describe the methodology used (section 3) and the empirical evidence of those relationships in the Netherlands, both from the perspective of NGOs and businesses (section 4). The final sections of this article outline several discussions and conclusions on how to include businesses in natural resources management by developing partnerships with NGOs (section 5).

NGO is a broad term to refer to all organisations that are neither an official part of a government, nor a private for-profit enterprise (Yaziji and Doh 2009). Often the terms “non-governmental”, “civil society” or “non-profit” organisations are used interchangeably, depending on the frame of the discussion (Seitanidi 2010). In this article, the term NGO has been used to manifest certain aspects, such as representation (membership-based organisations), their tactics and organisation characteristics.

2. Development of alliances between nature organisations and businesses

2.1. Changing governance in natural resource management

In general, governments have historically had a dominant position in the management of natural resources. However, they have experienced only limited

capacities to deal with them (Arts 2006). The spread of liberal ideology and the increasing complexity of environmental policy has driven states to give away certain tasks that could be better performed by other actors. This new public management facilitated the recognition of non-profit NGOs as suitable actors in environmental policy. NGOs have emerged from civil society groups that form more organised relationships around shared ideas, needs or causes to promote collective gain.

According to their activities, NGOs could be distinguished in “service” and “advocacy” sectors. Most NGOs have been dominated by service provision to governments (Anheier and Salamon 2006). Service-oriented NGOs provide goods and services to clients with unmet needs and serve as critical “safety nets” where states are unable or unwilling to provide for societal needs, and where global problems defy the conception of nation–state responsibilities. Advocacy NGOs work to shape the social, economic or political system to promote a given set of interests or ideology and seek for channels to achieve results with a main focus on gaining influence within formal policy processes. Examples of advocacy NGOs are international environmental organisations such as World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Greenpeace. In the last decades, these environmental NGOs have broadened their activities, because they perceived that traditional NGO techniques to gain power within formal policy processes were inadequate ways of achieving real changes.

For businesses, the collaboration with NGOs at first glance might seem to be illogical, as production processes are related to the deterioration of the environment. However, public awareness of the societal and environmental dimensions of business activities has increased considerably. Therefore, (inter)national firms may face strong uncertainty about their own interest when confronted with policies regarding the management of natural resources (Rittberger and Breitmeier 2000). Gathering of information about future economic implications of environmental policies is very important to them. To acquire this information, firms have to maintain contact with important actors in the issue area. Where, in the past businesses interacted mainly with their shareholders, nowadays, they must interact with a diversity of stakeholders regarding social and environmental issues. The result is that the information exchange between economic actors and NGOs has increased over the last decade (Jonker and Nijhof 2006). Businesses are moving towards seeking ways of combining ecological values with economic interests, while NGOs seek more effective ways to influence the management of natural resources and gather funding. Such partnerships or social alliances are part of a trend that view NGOs not so much as “gadflies” but as “allies” (Yaziji 2004).

2.2. Changing nature conservation perspectives in the Netherlands

The public-NGO alliance of Dutch nature and landscape organisations with the government has not always been evident. In the first half of the last century, citizens founded NGOs to protect nature areas from economic development. The national green NGO for the protection of birds – Vogelbescherming, nowadays a partner of Birdlife international (www.vogelbescherming.nl) – was founded in 1899 by citizens to protest against the use of putting dead birds on lady’s hats. In 1905, citizens avoided the development of a refuse dump nearby Amsterdam and founded the national NGO Natuurmonumenten to buy this natural area (www.natuurmonumenten.nl). Later, its chairman took the initiative to found the provincial landscape

organisations – Provinciale Landschappen (www.de12Landschappen.nl) – to organise the fight against the destruction of natural areas at a regional level (Beckers 2010).¹

In the second half of the last century, due to a strong social support, the conservation of natural areas has become institutionalised and has become the responsibility of the government. During the last decades, the green NGOs have mainly worked to conserve and develop nature areas by purchasing land property rights with public subsidies. Not only nature organisations but also the provincial landscape organisations were focussed on the conservation of biodiversity according to government objectives. Simultaneously, public appreciation of nature aesthetics (linked to recreation) lost its prominent place and became substituted by ecological values. This resulted in a main ecological approach, based on scientific values of experts, which hardly appealed to the aesthetical and recreational nature experiences of lay people (Van Koppen 2002; Beckers 2010). However, since the improvement of biodiversity circumstances did not appeal much to citizens (Buijs 2009), while the societal support for NGOs is important in legitimising the execution of their public functions, they are pressured to improve it.

2.3. Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

In general, for businesses, there are several reasons to collaborate with NGOs. Social acceptance and a good reputation have become major conditions to ensure the continuity of a business (Seitanidi 2010; Van Huijstee 2010). The suppliers and buyers of their products and services demand more efforts to deal with their societal and environmental impacts. Businesses can make their contribution visible by developing a policy for corporate social responsibility (CSR). By creating a CSR policy, businesses aim to develop a better image. Relationships with NGOs can provide businesses access to resources and skills that support their CSR efforts. CSR functions as a corporate interpretation of the concept of sustainable development, in which businesses not only focus on financial value creation, but also on social and environmental value creation. Its aim is not just to improve the quality of their product, but also the production process.

In the past, businesses developed their CSR independently of consumers. The first generation of CSR was a kind of philanthropy without clear ideas about its objectives (Zadek et al. 2003). The next generation focused on reporting and realising social and environmental objectives (Zadek et al. 2003; Spaargaren and Van Koppen 2009). With these sustainability reports, businesses earned their “license to produce” and improved their position in sustainability indexes used by the financial markets. The current third generation attempts to create markets that reward sustainable behaviour (Zadek et al. 2003; Spaargaren and Van Koppen 2009). The involvement of consumers in CSR depends on the degree to which businesses can create storylines that highlight not only how sustainable their product or service is, but also the production process.

The application of the CSR concept is flexible and often normative, in which every company emphasises the aspects that are most relevant to their “core business” (Hupperts and Van Leenders 2003). Literature on the relationship between businesses and society confirms this and shows that the concept of CSR is applied in a normative, idealistic and opportunistic manner. Although, the instruments of CSR are still limited (Dentchev 2009), Spaargaren and Van Koppen (2009) expect a certain logic. A company without progress in the greening of their production

process cannot provide a reliable image and story about it. Businesses that do not pursue this logic of reliability are “greenwashing” by providing images and stories to consumers, which do not accurately reflect the actual production process. In line with the aforementioned involvement of consumers in CSR, it is expected that the credibility of businesses is undermined if through donations or sponsorships to NGOs, they try to offset the impacts on society and the environment in their day-to-day operations.

NGOs can influence consumer-oriented business strategies with their knowledge of and involvement in societal agenda setting. They can publish claims that cause damage to businesses reputations if their activities do not contribute to sustainability. However, they can also strengthen the reputation of businesses if they do contribute. Van Huijstee (2010) analysed the cooperation between the Dutch Rabobank and the WWF about investments in palm oil and showed that as a result of their interaction, business and NGO have changed their organisation strategies, policies and structures.

2.4. NGO–business alliances

There are multiple ways in which NGOs and businesses can collaborate. To evaluate them, we will use the typology of collaborations from Austin (2000). The typology centres around the nature of value creation in collaborations; this can be characterised as one-sided, two-sided or collective. Austin (2000) considers the collaborations on a continuum and describes them in three stages, in which they are developing from philanthropic, transactional towards integrative.

The philanthropic stage is the most traditional and common relationship, where businesses generally make a monetary donation to a NGO. Philanthropic relationships are one-sided based on the goodwill of the businesses and the fund-raising requirements of the NGO. The magnitude of resources involved is mainly monetary, while the level of managerial management is low. The next stage consists of a transactional relationship, which is negotiated with a two-sided perspective. More core competences are exchanged with a shared vision at the top of both organisations. The negotiations between the business and the NGO are distributive. They aim to achieve mutual benefit from the exchange of specified assets and activities in order to find a compromise between the needs of both organisations. Occasionally, a bargaining relationship develops into an integrative partnership with a joint perspective and common value creation, in which insight in each other's priorities are recognised and satisfactorily resolved (Van Woerkum and Aarts 2008). In this type of relationship, both partners aim to share resources, knowledge and capabilities and jointly develop goals and match activities that will achieve the greatest common benefit. This requires not much communication about needs, but a shared understanding of the partner's underlying interests. Seitanidi (2010) and Van Huijstee (2010) have examined the integrative relationships through in-depth case studies. However, it must be noted that the number of described integrative partnerships has been rather limited so far (Kolk et al. 2008).

Considering the role of businesses in the Netherlands, a survey showed that two-thirds of them contributed to a charity in 2007 (De Gilder and Schuyt 2009). More than two-thirds of the contribution was a financial donation, while the rest came by goods or voluntary work of employees. Businesses mainly supported local goals with a preference for sport and to a lesser extent for culture. Environment,

nature conservation and animal protection were a less common recipient of sponsorship from businesses and vice versa. Sponsorship formed just a small percentage of the revenue of the nature organisations (Overbeek and De Graaff 2010).

Regarding the international business–NGO collaborations for nature conservation, initially, they were quite philanthropic with NGOs determining where and how to spend the money. Nowadays, businesses aim more often at a two-sided or transactional collaboration, while paying more attention to the services NGOs can provide in return. More and more they take the initiative and come up with ideas on the allocation of the donation and the accompanying publicity. In the Netherlands, international NGOs such as the WWF have developed strategic partnerships with a selected number of businesses whose activities have a great impact on nature. Partners could be found among energy providers and within the timber, fish, palm oil and soya market chain (www.wnf.nl).

2.5. *Conditions to cooperate*

If environmental NGOs and businesses would like to cooperate with each other and thus realise at least a transactional relationship, the question is to what extent such a cooperation really develops. Generally, the attraction between parties is mainly determined by complementary resources (Table 1). To work with each other, there should be an interest in a mutual exchange in a selection of core assets, knowledge or networks (Jonker and Nijhof 2006). Core assets refer to the financial contribution of businesses to the NGOs and the communication strategies of NGOs to influence consumer decisions. Knowledge is broadly defined and may refer to the image and ecological expertise of NGOs, and also to the commercial and production expertise of businesses. Human resources refer to the employees of the businesses and the NGOs. Exchange of networks may concern the consumers who buy products and services of the businesses and the members of the NGOs.

The primary resources that NGOs possess may allow them to argue that they can provide a green image to businesses, to have an extensive member network and to be able to advise them on solving ecological problems and communication with citizens. Businesses may be able to provide the NGOs a financial contribution and knowledge. Besides the interest to exchange resources, there are several other conditions required for cooperation (Rondinelli and London 2003). One of the conditions is that national and regional businesses and NGOs appeal to each other's mission.

To develop a relationship, it is important to be able to devise cooperation projects and to have interest in each other's resources and expertise. For NGOs, these could be access to extra financial resources, services or products, business

Table 1. Exchange of resources between businesses and NGOs.

	Businesses	NGOs
Core asset	Finances, products, services	Images, communication, services
Knowledge	Commercial, sector	Ecological, societal
Human resources	Employees	Employees, volunteers
Networks	Consumers	Members

networks, technology and knowledge, new perspectives and increased brand awareness. Possible benefits for businesses are a better image and reputation, a better morale among employees, attracting and developing skills, enrichment of the corporate values and culture and increasing confidence among consumers and investors (Austin 2000; Austin et al. 2006).

The cooperation could start with an exchange of skills and resources, which helps a company to gain access to knowledge about the topics relevant to their core activities. The member network of NGOs could help to tap into potential new consumer groups. Therefore, in further collaboration, businesses should not only identify themselves with a specific project, but also see the members of NGOs as possible consumers. NGOs may be interested in certain resources and competences of businesses. An example is that businesses may offer financing and commercial knowledge in order to improve marketing strategies and expand member networks of nature organisations in order to increase their brand recognition.

3. Methodology

In order to better understand how nature organisations and businesses work together, interviews have been held with five fund-raising officers of NGO partners and 12 business representatives in the Netherlands (Harms and Overbeek 2011). The NGOs include three provincial landscape organisations (Gelders Landschap & Gelderse Kastelen, Landschap Noord-Holland, Limburgs Landschap) and two nature organisations (Natuurmonumenten Zuid-Holland & Zeeland, Vogelbescherming). In the Netherlands, each of the 12 provinces has a landscape organisation with a quite autonomous structure and a small umbrella organisation at the national level. Opposite to this regional structure are the aforementioned nature organisations (Natuurmonumenten Zuid-Holland & Zeeland, Vogelbescherming) with a strong central organisation and regional agencies.

Through the contacts of the NGOs, mainly regional-oriented businesses have been found. To get a broader geographical picture, a number of businesses with a (inter)national focus have also been selected. The selection of businesses is not representative, but mainly aims to explore the opportunities to enhance their contribution to nature. The businesses are classified on the basis of their market orientation and to the range of their communicated CSR activities. The market orientation can be focussed mainly towards other businesses or towards consumers. In CSR, the geographical scale of the audience and the visibility of the businesses play an important role. This scale ranges from regional to (inter) national, and does not necessarily coincide with the market orientation. The reason is that businesses that produce for the world market may position their CSR at a regional scale, if they wish to secure labour availability through a sound location policy towards municipalities and residents.

In total, six of the twelve businesses are oriented towards other businesses and focus their CSR mainly at a regional scale, while in the opposite direction, three businesses are more oriented towards consumer markets and position their CSR at a national scale. The other three businesses are positioned between these opposite directions (Figure 1). The businesses oriented towards other businesses concerned with the following activities; tillage, construction, chemical industries and car rental (among others). The businesses oriented towards consumers include a nature travel

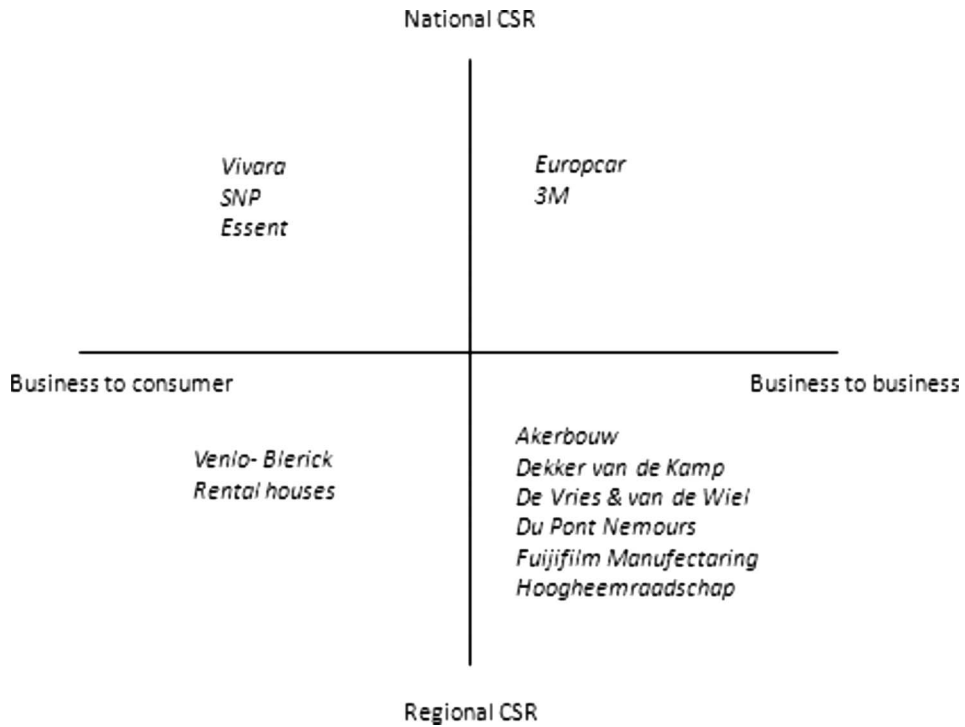


Figure 1. Interviewed businesses according to their markets and scale of CSR.

organisation, a producer of bird forage and nesting boxes, an energy provider and a housing corporation.

The interviews have been based on a list of topics, concerning the background of the organisation or business, the sponsor(ing) strategy, the motivation for sponsor(ing) of nature and landscape and the expectations about the collaboration in the future.

4. Results

The affinity of businesses towards nature and landscape has a variety of reasons, where the direct relation with the core activities is paramount. The relation arises from the physical impact of their activities or by selling products that are related to the experience of nature and the landscape. In addition, there are also businesses with activities that have a negative impact, for instance, tillage and construction businesses and chemical industries. They ask for NGOs advice how they might run their business more sustainably. Next, we will address the individual resources' exchanges between NGOs and businesses, and subsequently, we will reflect on the motivation of businesses to exchange certain resources.

4.1. Core assets

The financial policy of the provincial landscapes (Gelders Landschap & Gelderse Kastelen, Landschap Noord-Holland, Limburgs Landschap) focuses on donations

of businesses and citizens. These contributions are not specified to a specific project and thus may be spent by the NGOs according to their own views. Contributions, which are tagged for specific projects or activities, are more common among the nature organisations (Natuurmonumenten Zuid-Holland & Zeeland, Vogelbescherming). Those contributions require more efforts from the NGOs and the development of customised, visible and appealing projects. As a rule, the unspecified contributions will be spent over a number of years, while the tagged contributions are used in a lump sum for a specific project. The trend is that businesses express more often their preference for specified contributions and mutual benefits. This requires that the fundraisers and the relation managers have to present more projects that will appeal to businesses.

According to the fundraisers of the nature organisations, their NGOs have a strong national brand, while their regional profile is often weak. The fundraiser of the Vogelbescherming explains to cherish its image associated with the enjoyment of birds and communicates predominantly positive elements, because these contribute to the willingness of the public to protect birds. Negative messages or problems with protection are avoided. The fundraiser of Natuurmonumenten Zuid-Holland & Zeeland sees both sides of the communication as valid. Although the regional profile of the three selected provincial landscapes is neither well developed, image development seems to play a less important role for them. According to the fundraisers, they have developed a more personal and direct customer relationship instead of image building.

Businesses see Natuurmonumenten and Vogelbescherming as national organisations with an A-brand. Therefore, if they are mainly interested in the brand for collaboration, they contact the central office of Natuurmonumenten instead of the regional office. Contrary to this, the fundraisers of the regional agencies have to take the initiative to contact the regional-oriented businesses. The regional-oriented businesses are often smaller and attach less importance to the communication of the CSR policy and image conservation. These directors consider it “window dressing” and want their activities to speak for themselves. They prefer to apply an informal and relational approach, while the businesses at a national level are often larger with more organisation rules formalised in a CSR policy. In particular, businesses that sell their products and services directly to consumers are interested to improve their image with nature organisations. The latter play an important role in their heuristic communication strategies (e.g. Aarts and Van Woerkum 2008) to appeal customers interested in sustainable products and services.

4.2. Knowledge

Nature organisations rarely profile their own knowledge to the businesses and they also rarely demand it from them. Some provincial landscapes profile their knowledge to businesses, for instance, by helping them to organise the communication about, and the participation of residents within the local plans for tillage and construction activities. Further, they offer them ecological and landscape advice (Limburgs Landschap). Sometimes businesses are asked to bring in their own capacities, for instance, to check the condition of the buildings owned by the landscape organisation and the necessary activities to improve them (Landschap Noord-Holland).

4.3. Human resources

Exchange of employees or volunteers between businesses and NGOs is still limited. An example of a contribution is to offer a prize among the employees of a nature organisation with the best idea how a car rental company could support this NGO.

4.4. Networks

A new and more important development is to connect and exchange consumers and clients with the members of the nature organisations. Businesses were already looking for more exposure through NGOs member networks. Nowadays, also nature organisations collaborate with consumer-oriented businesses for more brand awareness and potential members. In the Netherlands, the Vogelbescherming does this not only with clients of bird forage and nesting boxes, but also with the clients of nature travel organisations and outdoor shops. The provincial landscape NGOs do not yet exploit these possibilities. On the contrary, some organisations try to avoid business advertisements in their members' newsletter, and do not develop a relationship between their members' network and the businesses.

4.5. Business drivers for resource exchange

The sponsorship policy of the businesses is often based on one of the two following drivers. These drivers aim to get more brand awareness and to maintain good relationships. The drivers influence the requirements from the sponsored organisation, the desired overlap between potential customers and members groups of the NGOs and the method of activation.

For the businesses, for whom getting more brand awareness is paramount, the sponsor policy is much more pronounced, focused on a NGO with a high reputation and a membership network with potential customers. The interviewed representatives also have more explicit ideas about the reward than entrepreneurs and directors, who mainly attach to relationship management and who like to show their social involvement.

Businesses that prioritise relationship management are often highly dependent on the input from the region, such as finding employees or getting permits of the municipality. These directors prefer to select many smaller projects, not only in the field of nature and landscape, but also other local social goals. In addition, in the selection of the project to sponsor, the appreciation of the employees and clients also plays an important role. This concerns the extent to which the project can contribute to "company pride".

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. National or regional orientation

Our results describe the different roles of image and communication among NGOs. National green NGOs show a strong image to citizens, represent many members and regularly evaluate the pursued target groups. From this perspective, they are interesting for businesses that would like to increase their customer market for sustainable behaviour. Contrary to this, the provincial landscape organisations have developed a more personal and direct customer relationship with the directors and entrepreneurs of regional firms.

Also, businesses show different geographical orientations towards NGOs dependent on their CSR objectives. In the case of a national CSR orientation, directors and entrepreneurs aim to get a higher brand awareness in order to associate the core business with nature and to increase their visibility to potential clients. The NGO alliance forms a part of the CSR policy. Contrary to this, businesses with a regional CSR orientation focus on maintaining good relationships and consider a contribution to nature in the region as a part of their identity. The NGO alliance aims to contribute to their public relation management and to increase the societal appreciation in the region. Therefore, instead of focusing predominantly on nature, they will select more societal objectives in which residents will be interested. Thus, the different orientations of the businesses have consequences for their interests of how to collaborate with nature organisations and the resources they would like to exchange.

5.2. Conditions for a stronger relationship

The relationships between the selected businesses and NGOs are (still) limited, and they seem to develop differently. The national-oriented businesses often start to have a philanthropic relationship with nature organisations. In such a one-sided relationship, businesses that provide a financial contribution show few requirements regarding how and where the money is spent, and do not expect an extensive reward for their contribution. These relationships are gradually developing to a transactional stage, in which businesses negotiate more and elaborate their needs. This also leads to increased trust from which options to deliver not only financial contributions, but also knowledge and networks can be explored. In this collaboration, businesses often have more to say in the project and, therefore, for example, share responsibility for the publicity of the project. Hence, their relationship with the nature organisation develops from a sponsor into a partner. Regional businesses also start with a philanthropic relationship, but they collaborate more often with the provincial landscapes from a shared vision within a specific project. These partnerships emerge often from a personal contact with the director or public relations manager of the company.

5.3. Identity plays a crucial role

The identity of the national and regional nature organisations is an important reason why the collaboration between NGOs and businesses is still limited to a transactional stage with a moderate exchange of resources. Nature organisations see themselves first as a conservation organisation, and then as providers of nature for citizens as a member or as a recreational guest. The question is whether those organisations are able to exchange resources at equal value to businesses. At present, the support for business alliances is still limited to the involvement of fundraisers and public relation managers, who try to explore and understand the interests of the businesses. In the case of some provincial landscapes, the fundraisers also have a strategic function within the organisation. They involve their directors in contacts with businesses in order to strengthen the profile of the NGO.

The interviewees think that relationship management with businesses needs to be improved to develop towards a transactional stage. The main shortcomings are rooted in the low priority given to communication with businesses within the

organisation and the internally focused orientation of nature organisations. The NGOs are not able to show their strong points from an external perspective and to demonstrate how they can benefit businesses. Instead of communicating their “unique buying reasons”, they sustain in explaining their “unique selling points”. These findings have been supported by a survey conducted among 22 NGOs in Europe, which shows that they hardly use a more positive and pro-active approach towards businesses. The application of a pro-active approach does require some understanding of the motivations of businesses and their willingness to engage (Church and Narberhaus 2008). Furthermore, it is also unclear to organisations to what extent the exchange of knowledge might be valuable for businesses and vice versa. It is expected that a better use of each other’s knowledge will be an important bargaining power for both businesses, and nature and landscape organisations. On the other hand, also businesses are not always outspoken on the societal role they would like to play and to what extent nature organisations could help them to achieve it.

5.4. *Towards more cooperation*

Until now, it is not evident that businesses and NGOs consider differences in assets, knowledge, resources and networks between them as complementary. Therefore, the gap between both parties may remain too large to enhance ways of thinking into a cooperation (Hupperts and Van Leenders 2003). The question is also to what extent it will be necessary to intensify the cooperation between national and regional NGOs and businesses, and how this could be realised. Both parties will have to wonder what they want from each other, and what it is they have to offer in return. National organisations are more relevant for businesses looking for more visibility or a stronger image, while for obtaining more goodwill, the regional organisations are a better partner. NGOs searching for a large financial contribution should have an appealing project, taking into account that the effort to collaborate with such a company does not exceed their own capabilities to the alliance.

In addition, improvements can be made. In the first place, the public relation management of the green NGOs could be improved at the regional level. The question is whether they communicate their knowledge about sustainable production to businesses effectively. More reflection and communication about the significance of their activities can be a good contribution to businesses. Second, it is important for NGOs to reinforce good behaviour of businesses for nature and landscape. Although NGOs inform their members on the environmental impacts of consumer choices (for example, through the carbon footprint), consumer choices are not translated into impacts on biodiversity and natural processes. More information about the impacts is necessary. Businesses will contribute if they fear reputation damage, scarcity of commodities, or if they foresee the creation of a market for sustainable behaviour. These motivations create an increasing self-interest for the realisation of win-win solutions in collaboration with NGOs.

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Note

1. In the Netherlands, according to their number of members, the main nature organisations are WNF (founded in 1962, over 900,000 members), Natuurmonumenten (750,000 members), the Provinciale Landschappen (400,000 members) and Vogelbescherming (150,000 members).

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