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**Uncovering strategies of hidden intention in  
multi-stakeholder initiatives: the case of  
pasture-raised milk**

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# **Uncovering strategies of hidden intention in multi-stakeholder initiatives: the case of pasture-raised milk**

## **Abstract**

Sustainability management often requires voluntary initiatives beyond legal regulations. Hereby, multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) gain importance. Despite the actual high occurrence of these initiatives, little information concerning the stakeholders' negotiation behaviour in MSIs exists. In this paper, we analyse a MSI related to the implementation of a sustainability-oriented standard for pasture-raised milk in Germany using participatory research. The results indicate that from an economic point of view not all stakeholders behave in a predictable way. Contrary to the assumption, one dairy involved in the MSI following a cost leadership strategy, pled for a high standard, as did the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved. Because this dairy was unable to fulfil this high standard, this behaviour can be interpreted as a 'prevention strategy'. It can be concluded that the classical assumption of stakeholder behaviour – such as tit-for-tat negotiations between the economic side and NGOs – must be reviewed, revealing strategies of hidden intention.

**Keywords:** multi-stakeholder initiative, stakeholder negotiation strategies, prevention strategy, hidden intention, pasture-raised milk, sustainability

## **1 Introduction**

Sustainability has been deemed in the literature to be a 'wicked problem' (Batie, 2008; Moura and Chaddad, 2012), a term that refers to issues which are highly complex due to multiple causes and unknown outcomes (Dentoni et al., 2012). Solving 'wicked problems' in the agri-food system requires the inclusion of multiple stakeholders, both inside and outside the supply chain (Dentoni et al., 2012); therefore, multi-stakeholder partnerships are often defined as a new tool that can be used to tackle sustainability problems and to overcome deadlocked structures (Hemmati, 2002; Biermann et al., 2007). Especially in a situation where statutory provisions are lacking or inadequate, an alliance of stakeholders along the supply chain may be able to provide a solution (Kell and Ruggie, 1999; Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000; see also Biermann et al., 2007) because they can close the 'operational and participatory gap' (Reinicke and Deng, 2000). Aside from the interdisciplinary composition, which allows a focused, on-topic discussion and ideally generates high approval from all integrated groups,

there are further advantages of multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs). For instance, politics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can often be integrated (Dentoni et al., 2012), further increasing the initiative's credibility and acceptance by the public (Burchell and Cook, 2006; O'Rourke, 2006). Many examples of MSIs in the field of sustainability and food production or land use are readily available – such as the Marine Stewardship Council, the Rainforest Alliance and the case of Bonsucro (Vallejo and Hauselmann, 2004; Moura and Chaddad, 2012). Nevertheless, multi-stakeholder processes have also been criticised; for example, their efficiency has been questioned and the lack of monitoring has been noticed (Hale and Mauzerall, 2004; Hartwich et al., 2005; Tondreau, 2005).

Research on MSIs is a relatively new area of interest. Distributed over various disciplines, the research remains underdeveloped (Moura and Chaddad, 2012) and little information concerning the stakeholders' negotiation behaviour in MSIs exists. To approach this research gap, we observed a MSI in the field of agriculture and food production, specifically in the milk supply chain in Germany, related to the implementation of a sustainability-oriented standard for pasture-raised milk. The objective of this study is to analyse the different roles of the stakeholders, as well as their positions and negotiation strategies in the MSI.

In the context of sustainability, pasture-raised milk has become an important issue in Germany, likewise in other European countries (Elgersma, 2012; Heerwagen et al., 2013; Weinrich et al., 2016). By the year 2025, Reijs et al. (2013) have predicted that there will be a clear decrease in the percentage of dairy cows with access to pasture in several North-western European countries. For North-West Germany they forecast a sharp reduction of dairy cows with access to pasture from nearly 50% to only 5%. This development is not preferable because it is known from various studies that pasture grazing of dairy cows has a positive influence on the environment and biodiversity (Metera and Sakowski, 2010), as well as on animal welfare (White et al., 2002; Hernandez-Mendo et al., 2007; Ambrecht et al., 2015). Additionally, pasturing is positively perceived by the broader public and is more widely accepted than entirely indoor-housing systems (Weinrich et al., 2014). Consequently, pasture-raised milk can lead to higher added value by product differentiation (Conner and Oppenheim, 2008; Getter et al., 2014; Weinrich et al., 2014). Thus, pasturing of dairy cows and the marketing of pasture-raised milk could enhance sustainability for both the economy and the public. In this way, pasturing may be able to promote public perception and the image of the dairy industry (Ellis et al., 2009).

When buying pasture-raised milk, consumers cannot verify for themselves whether the cows have truly had access to pasture or not. According to information economics, pasturing is a so-called credence good (Akerlof, 1970). It is, therefore, especially important in this case to provide consumers with reliable information about the conditions under which the milk has been produced. Therefore, a unified standard and clear labelling are crucial (Weinrich et al., 2016) to support the pasturing of dairy cows by marketing this type of milk at a higher price and preventing the possibility of mislabelling and cheating. Some dairies in Germany, as well as in other European countries, have already brought pasture-raised milk to the market. Originating from the Netherlands, the widely used standard is to have a minimum grazing period of 6 hours for 120 days of the year for the cows used in the production of pasture-raised milk (TopAgrar, 2011). However, a binding standard regarding which milk products are allowed to be deemed pasture-raised is lacking in the German market and consumer protection agencies have claimed cases of insufficient labelling or cheating in the German market (Verbraucherzentrale, 2014).

The authors were involved in the MSI related to the implementation of a sustainability-oriented standard for pasture-raised milk in Germany, and they obtained the necessary insights into the stakeholders' negotiation behaviour using the methodology of participatory action research (Whyte, 1991; Kemmis, 2001). Although Moura and Chaddad (2012) used a similar case study approach when analysing the case of sustainability in sugar cane production (Bonsucro), they do not explicitly deal with the different positions of the respective stakeholders or their negotiation strategies. Up to this point, little research has been done with the objective of determining stakeholder positions in the negotiation processes (de Moor and Weigand, 2004). It is known that different stakeholders have specific roles in networks (Rahwan et al., 2003; Arenas et al., 2009); nevertheless, to our best knowledge, no previous studies have analysed and verified the expected roles of stakeholders in real situations. Therefore, the study aims to investigate the positions of the different stakeholders involved in the creation of a unified standard and label for pasture-raised milk in Germany. Further, the stakeholders' negotiation strategies will be analysed. This study may lead to a better understanding of the nature of multi-stakeholder processes in order to increase their efficiency and to strengthen credibility.

## **2 Theoretical background of multi-stakeholder initiatives**

### *2.1 Positions of different stakeholder groups derived from literature*

For stakeholder management, it is important for politics as well as companies to identify the relevant stakeholders in an issue, decide how to react to them and to consider how important they are (Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000). In this context, stakeholders can be defined as all persons, whether individual or juridical, who are involved in and/or affected by the case and/or could influence it (Freeman, 1984; Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000). According to Roloff (2008a), multi-stakeholder groups can be defined as “networks in which actors from civil society, business and governmental institutions come together in order to find a common approach to an issue that affects them all” (p. 238). The cooperation of these diverse groups along the supply chain is aimed not only at combining their knowledge, interests and experiences but also brings attention to barriers of acceptance and practicability (Freeman, 1984; Jenkins et al., 2002; Fransen and Kolk, 2007). Thus, in MSIs, different stakeholders are expected to have specific positions which correspond to their interests. These positions are often seen as fixed, as is also the case for seller-buyer-negotiation-roles (Clopton, 1984).

To gain an overview of the different stakeholder groups that are integrated in multi-stakeholder processes, Freeman`s stakeholder model was used as the basis of our work (Freeman, 1984). The initial model was later adjusted by Freeman to include additional groups, mainly pressure groups (Freeman, 2003; Fassin, 2009). He reduced the internal stakeholders that directly influence the company to five (financers, customers, communities, employees and suppliers) and added six external stakeholders (NGOs, environmentalists, the government, critics, media and others) which are not directly linked to the company (Freeman, 2004; Fassin, 2009).

In the following, the focus will be on the most important stakeholder groups mentioned in nearly all studies that refer to multi-stakeholder processes, such as economy, society/consumers, NGOs and governments (e.g., Burger and Mayer, 2003).

*Economy:* Although diverse organisations are combined under the term ‘economy’, companies are most frequently considered. The participation of companies in MSIs might be seen as preferable, reflecting a clear change of the relationship between business and society according to business ethics scholars (Roloff, 2008a). For decades, economic efficiency and social progress have been presumed to be a trade-off (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Nowadays, there are many examples of companies acting as social entrepreneurs (Porter and Kramer,

2011; Dentoni and Veldhuizen, 2012) pioneering in a new field of creating shared value for economy and society at the same time.

Since more than one company is generally included in MSIs (Roloff, 2008a), it is necessary to distinguish between different types of companies. According to Porter (1998), companies are divided into two groups in compliance with their main (generic) competitive strategy: some companies focus on a cost leadership strategy, while others pursue a market-differentiation strategy (Porter, 1998). Thus, it can be assumed that interests concerning criteria or standards in a discussion process (e.g., for a label) will differ (Porter, 1998). For cost leaders, it is more difficult to make a profit with products that are produced according to high sustainability standards at a high price, whereas market differentiators can use these features to enhance the marketing of their products. However, independent from the competitive strategy a company implements, Roloff (2008a) argues that companies which are part of MSIs are normally willing to cooperate with other stakeholders and to promote the process. Nevertheless, companies are generally economically orientated and their willingness to change production processes is limited by economical practicability, costs and efforts (Pedersen, 2006).

*Society/consumers:* Consumers or their representatives (such as NGOs in the field of consumer protection) are particularly involved in MSIs when dealing with cases of sustainability. Significantly, consumers aim to bring the wishes and ethical concerns of society into existence, for instance providing more sustainable products. Normally, consumers plead for higher standards in a given sector, such as ensuring animal welfare and protecting the environment. Oftentimes, consumers even wish for unrealistically high standards that are difficult to implement (Thorsøe, 2015). However, they can be drivers of movements towards improved sustainability and may even pressurise other stakeholders to meet their expectations in cases where they are not satisfied with the actual standard. They want transparent and credible standards (Henson and Reardon, 2005).

*NGOs:* NGOs aim to ensure high standards with regards to sustainability, for example, in the fields of environmental protection and animal welfare (Arenas et al., 2009). They often suggest rather strict guidelines (Fransen and Kolk, 2007). Furthermore, NGOs are frequently initiators of MSIs as a result of their interest in changing a current state; for example they try to implement a standard that is desired by society (Utting, 2002; Fransen and Kolk, 2007), especially by parts of the society with high sustainability preferences. Together with governments, they often take the task of solving social problems (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Moreover, NGOs are involved in MSIs to guarantee increased credibility (Burchell and Cook,

2006; O'Rourke, 2006), while bringing consumer approved knowledge and experience to the field.

*Governments:* Governments are additional stakeholders who typically act in a moderating, compensatory way and lend a legal framework to the discussion process. They can, therefore, be seen as 'secondary' or external (Freeman, 2003) stakeholders because they are not directly involved in the production or consumption processes (Frederick et al., 1988). An advantage of the participation of governments in MSIs is that the authority and credibility of the discussion process and possible resulting standards increase (Fransen and Kolk, 2007). From a political point of view, MSIs might serve as new 'soft' policy tools, especially suitable for dealing with complex subjects, when high resistance is expected (Albareda et al., 2007; Steurer, 2011).

## *2.2 Interaction of different stakeholders in a MSI and negotiation tactics*

It can be expected that stakeholders tend to cooperate with and support other stakeholders that pursue the same goal, as well as undermine those which are non-supportive (Savage et al., 1991; Mitchell et al., 1997; Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000; Blair et al., 2004). Ultimately, every agent will try to pursue their own targets (Rahwan et al., 2003; Arenas et al., 2009). Thus, it is in the nature of such discussion processes that extreme positions come into conflict. Regarding the difficulties in these processes, Boström (2006) mentions that "it may be a demanding task to organise a broad range of clearly different and normally disagreeing interest groups in a way that is both effective and permanent" (p. 346). The willingness to negotiate is, among other things, determined by each stakeholder's willingness to cooperate with the other stakeholders (Wedekind and Milinski, 1996). In this context, different stakeholder strategies could be considered. One strategy that might be used in MSIs is known from research in the field of the Prisoner's Dilemma game as the tit-for-tat strategy. Here, one participant must initiate the first step of cooperation, before following the moves of the other player in the next step (Axelrod, 1984). It can be expected that this strategy is also used between actors in MSIs: for example, between the economic side and NGOs: in the classical confrontation model it is assumed that both sides are restraining each other (Porter and Kramer, 2011), only giving in as far as the other side.

A potential risk of MSIs is that they can be used by individual groups to manipulate the decision-making process to achieve their desired outcome (Fransen and Kolk, 2007). If one party becomes extremely dominant, then the MSI may lose credibility and authority

(Boström, 2006). It is even possible that some stakeholders may act tactically to manipulate the discussion process in order to prevent an agreement in the process. Such a tactic may be used when it becomes clear that the discussion process does not fit a stakeholder's degree of aspiration, in which case the stakeholder will choose conflict and avoid reaching an agreement (Rahwan et al., 2003). In other cases where it may not be opportune to block the MSI or to leave it, it may be a better option to slow down the process instead. In this way it is possible for stakeholders to hide their actual goals. This tactic can be called a tactic of 'hidden intention', a term which is known from political sciences and economics (Picot and Wolff, 1994).

### **3 Case study: MSI for the implementation of a unified standard and a label for pasture-raised milk in Germany**

#### *3.1 Project outline*

A project was initiated by politics in April 2014 that includes stakeholders along the milk supply chain in Germany in coming to an agreement for a sustainability-oriented, unified standard for pasture-raised milk. Moreover, this project aims to develop a label for pasture-raised milk. Regarding the term pasture-raised, the standard should be determined related to the pasturing length and feeding (e.g. free of genetically modified organisms) as well as husbandry conditions (e.g. barn with a paddock in the winter) for dairy cows. A further aim of the project is the sustainable conservation of grassland, along with a higher value creation for farmers who keep their cows on pasture. The project was planned to last for approximately three years and it was managed by representatives from the field of grassland protection. The case study reports from the discussion process until an agreement on a unified standard for a label was reached and the first two phases of the project were completed. Four workshops, each with a duration of one or two days, have been held until this point. In the first workshop, the different actors of the project were brought together and mobilised. The project targets were also discussed and determined. The second workshop dealt with the design and marketing opportunities for a label. On this basis, the third and fourth workshops addressed the standard for a label, such as grazing period for the cows, eventually leading to an agreement.

### 3.2 Overview of the stakeholders

Approximately 30 to 40 representatives from politics, the dairy industry, and the agricultural sector, from the field of environmental, grassland, animal and consumer protection as well as from science were involved in the discussions. These stakeholders were selected for the start of the project to guarantee that representatives of many groups would be involved. Nevertheless, the number of stakeholders was limited to guarantee a good and manageable discussion (Roloff, 2008b). A selection bias could be discussed at this point because the stakeholders were asked for their interest in participating in the MSI beforehand and participation was voluntarily. An overview of all stakeholders involved in the project is given in Table 1. One of the dairies involved follows a cost leadership strategy, while the other two dairies are both smaller and follow a hybrid strategy (partly focusing on low costs and partly focusing on a market differentiation strategy).

**Table 1.** Overview of the stakeholders involved in the project.

<b>Field</b>	<b>Stakeholder<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Politics</b>	Representatives from politics
<b>Dairy industry</b>	Dairy 1: Cost leadership strategy Dairy 2: Hybrid strategy Dairy 3: Hybrid strategy Dairy Industry Association Association of cooperatives
<b>Agriculture</b>	Chamber of Agriculture Conventional farmer associations (4) Alternative farmer associations (2)
<b>Environmental protection</b>	Non-governmental organisations (2)
<b>Grassland protection</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>Animal protection</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>Consumer protection</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>Science</b>	University research groups in the field of Agricultural Sciences

<sup>1</sup>In the case of several associations of one stakeholder group taking part in the project, the respective number of associations is indicated in brackets.

**Source:** own presentation.

Additionally, representatives from four conventional and two alternative farmer associations (representing smallholders) took part in the discussions, as well as representatives from two NGOs in the field of environmental protection, one NGO in the field of grassland protection, one in the field of animal protection and one in the field of consumer protection. University researchers from the field of agricultural sciences were also involved.

## **4 Methodology**

### *4.1 Participatory research approach*

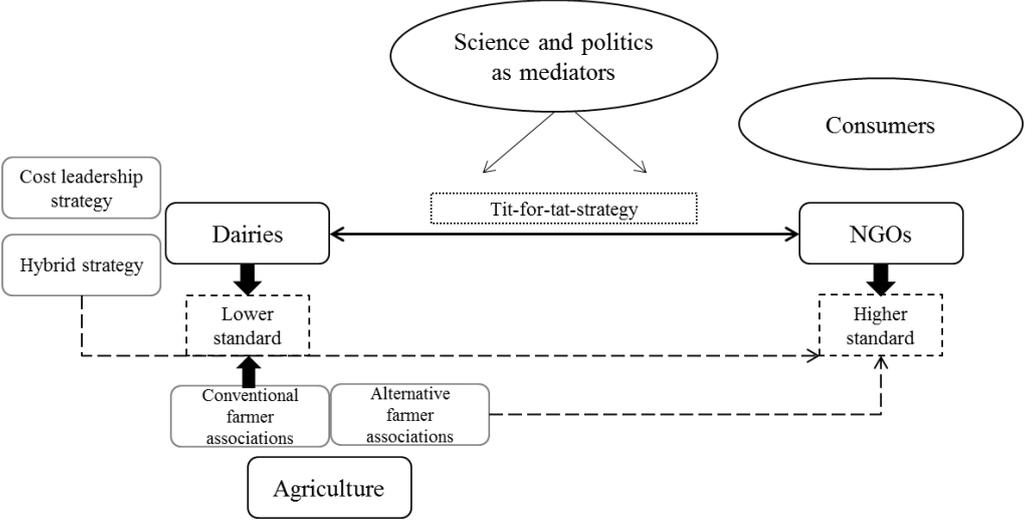
Many different approaches can be used to analyse multi-stakeholder processes, such as using participatory (action) research (PAR) (Whyte, 1991; Kemmis, 2001). For scientists, PAR has the advantage that this kind of research allows them to obtain insights under real conditions into the actual problems of, for example, supply chains (McTaggart, 1991). Thus, researchers are integrated into practical discussions (Bergold and Thomas, 2012), which allows for a detailed analysis of the involved stakeholders' attitudes towards the topic. Another advantage of the participatory integration of stakeholders into a research process is that alternatives and difficulties can be discussed openly and practically, and are supported by real experiences (Welp et al., 2006; Cole and Whitmarsh, 2008).

For this study, the PAR approach is used as a result of the authors actively participating in the MSI, as previously mentioned. Additionally, the analysis of this case study is based on internal project documents, such as written protocols from the discussions.

### *4.2 Developing a model of expected roles of stakeholders for the case of pasture-raised milk*

Based on the stakeholder positions described in the literature (see section 2.1), the authors developed a model of expected stakeholder positions for the MSI for pasture-raised milk in Germany (see Figure 1), covering the most important stakeholder groups. According to Freeman's stakeholder model (Freeman, 2003), internal stakeholders are defined as all stakeholders that are directly linked to the supply chain of milk, including agriculture-based parties (e. g. farmer associations) and dairies, as well as retail and consumers. Retail is an important stakeholder within the supply chain but for the first two phases of the MSI this stakeholder has not been integrated into the discussion because the stakeholder network first needed to stabilise. Furthermore, NGOs, the government and others are defined as external stakeholders (Freeman, 2003). Although scientific stakeholders were not considered by Freeman (2003), they are increasingly concerned with sustainability issues (Dentoni et al.,

2012). Therefore, they were included in the MSI, serving as ‘objective’ advisors and mediators together with political stakeholders.



**Figure 1.** Model of expected stakeholder positions suggesting classical tit-for-tat negotiations between economy and NGOs.

**Source:** own presentation.

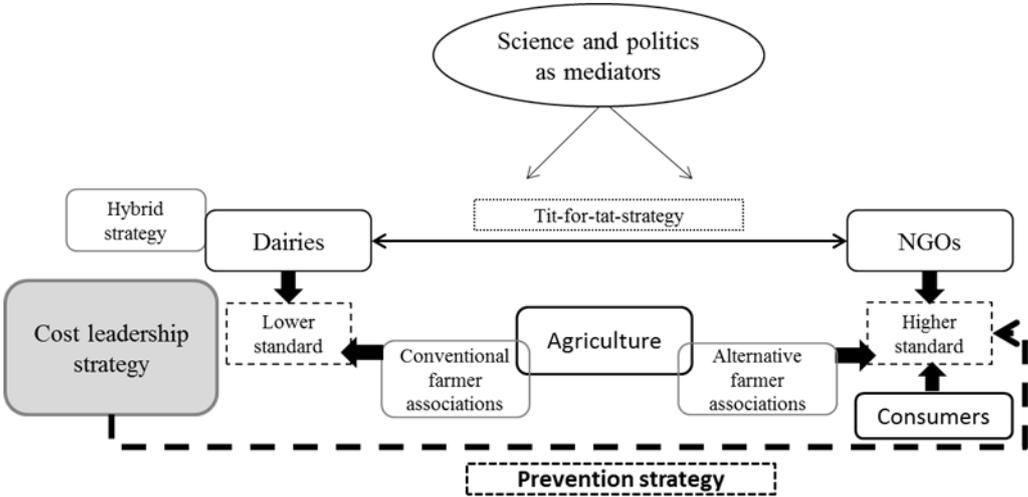
Developing a standard for the production of pasture-raised milk is especially concerned with the obligatory grazing period for dairy cows. A higher standard is defined as a longer pasturing period for cows, whereas a lower standard implies comparably shorter grazing periods. Longer grazing periods lead to higher costs and lower milk yields for farmers and dairies.

According to the typical distribution of roles and the classical confrontation model, in which it is assumed that economy and NGOs are restraining each other (Porter and Kramer, 2011), it can be suggested that the most controversial discussion will take place between the dairies and the NGOs involved in the MSI (see Figure 1). The appearance of the tit-for-tat strategy – as previously mentioned – between the two parties is assumed. The NGOs – who also represent the consumers – are expected to plead for a higher standard for pasture-raised milk according to the aims of their organisations. In contrast, the economic side – as represented by dairies and agriculture – is thought to be rather focused on a lower standard due to economic interests. Nevertheless, this point must be further distinguished: the conventional farmer associations were expected to support a lower standard for the purpose of easier implementation, whereas alternative farmer associations (often organic farmer associations) might try to distinguish themselves from the conventional farmer associations in lobbying for a different approach of producing milk, including longer grazing periods and thus a higher

standard. Similarly, dairies following a hybrid strategy might endeavour to set themselves apart from dairies following a clear cost leadership strategy while focusing on niche marketing; for this, a higher standard is also favourable.

### 5 Results and Discussion

In the course of the MSI, it became evident that the model of expected stakeholder positions based on the classical confrontation model between the economy and NGOs does not entirely explain the negotiation behaviour of all of the stakeholders involved in the MSI for pasture-raised milk. The model of stakeholder interests, disclosing observed negotiation strategies in the MSI, is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Model of stakeholder interests presenting negotiation strategies in the MSI for pasture-raised milk.

**Source:** own presentation.

In the model, the authors have particularly tried to emphasise the positions and strategies of dairies, NGOs and consumers, farmer associations, scientific and political stakeholders because these groups predominantly influenced the discussion process. In the course of the MSI, the pasturing length for dairy cows for the production of milk that may be marketed under the term pasture-raised (and a respective label) was the main point of discussion between the stakeholders, and the results presented are, therefore, concentrated on this issue. The Dutch standard (120 days/6 hours per day) was used as an orientation for the pasturing length. Thereby, this standard was seen as a minimum by some stakeholders whereas other groups argued that this standard was already too high and would exclude some farmer groups.

During the project, science and politics held moderating roles, acting as external stakeholders, as expected. The representatives from these sectors accompanied the project workshops and they attempted to bring the discussion process forward, thereby serving as mediators and ‘objective’ consultants during the unification process (see Figure 2). While politics provided the legal framework for developing a unified standard and a label, pushing the process forward by acting result-oriented, the researchers gave a theoretical input for possible marketing strategies, label variants as well as giving an insight into the consumers’ demands and attitudes towards pasture-raised milk. Other researchers gave recommendations with regard to animal health and grassland science for the production of pasture-raised milk. Furthermore, the representatives of grassland protection held neutral roles, moderating the discussion process as project leaders in the MSI.

The agricultural sector must be distinguished between conventional and alternative farmer associations, as has been assumed. Together with the Chamber of Agriculture, the conventional farmer associations pled for a lower standard (see Figure 2). More precisely, representatives of the conventional farmer associations switched back and forth between a general abatement of a label for pasture-raised milk and the desire to implement a standard lower than the 120/6 criterion (see Figure 2). In case of large conventional farms, a lack of sufficient grassland as well as larger herd sizes serve as barriers for the participation in a label programme (Kühl et al., 2016). Most of these farmers cannot offer their lactating cows access to pasture, or they only have limited access to pasture. Thus, in the case of a demanding standard, these farmers would be excluded from a label programme. Therefore, the conventional farmer associations argued that the criteria for pasture-raised milk could be sufficiently fulfilled even if only young cattle had access to pasture: the pasturing of these cows also had a positive influence on the protection of nature and animal welfare, and should consequently be supported. These farmer groups underlined the importance of the fact that consumers do not link the claim ‘pasture-raised milk’ to the quality of the milk but rather to the husbandry of dairy cows. They were worried that their milk from stabled cows could be devalued if pasture-raised milk according to a high standard was available on the market. Presently, little is known about the farmers’ attitudes towards market differentiation but these results indicate that they rather fear an abatement of conventional products. Thus, a negative attitude towards market differentiation may serve as a barrier for taking part in sustainable production programmes (Kühl et al., 2016), such as a label programme for pasture-raised milk.

The aim of comparably shorter grazing periods conflicts with the aims of alternative farmer associations as well as with those of other stakeholders, especially the NGOs. Alternative farmer associations lobbied for longer grazing periods and a label standard which was higher than the common 120/6 criterion (see Figure 2) because smallholder farmers could more easily keep their cows on pasture throughout the most time of the year. They wish to enforce their alternative approach of milk production and can usually easily implement a high standard on their farms; therefore, they declined to participate in a label programme that had a lower standard which they felt might depreciate their work and limit the benefits of a label to smallholders in market niches.

The NGOs, such as the animal welfare protection and both environmental protection organisations, pled for a high standard, as expected (see Figure 2). They tried to campaign for more sustainability in terms of animal welfare and environmental protection (Fransen and Kolk, 2007; Arenas et al., 2009), and they also argued for a standard higher than the general 120/6 criterion, under which cows only had access to pasture approximately 8% of the time on an annual basis. Regarding the participation of NGOs in the project, it must be mentioned that the representatives from the consumer protection association left the project after the first workshop due to a lack of manpower and the high workload associated with the project. However, in the first workshop they also argued for a high label standard, as did the other NGOs.

In contrast to the assumption that the dairies following a hybrid strategy would lobby for a comparably higher standard, these dairies instead pled for a lower standard according to the 120/6 criterion. It became evident that these dairies – neither focusing entirely on market differentiation nor on a lowest cost-production – did not aim at niche marketing for pasture-raised milk. One of these two dairies already produces pasture-raised milk and has its own initiatives for its farmers, producing according to the 120/6 standard based on the Dutch example. The other dairy involved in the project, which also pursues a hybrid strategy, does not yet produce pasture-raised milk but is more oriented to producing cheese, milk powder and butter. Representatives of both dairies were not interested in implementing a higher standard and they voted for the simple 120/6 standard. This also held true for the Dairy Industry Association and the association of cooperatives on the side of the dairy industry. The position of the third dairy following a cost leadership strategy will be discussed later.

The extreme opposites concerning a label standard between the dairies and conventional farmer associations on the one side, and the NGOs and alternative farmer associations on the

other side in the unification process made the discussion process very difficult and led to a tenacious rapprochement between the two opposing parties. Here, the classical way of confrontation between parts of the economic side and NGOs (Porter and Kramer, 2011) could be observed, leading to tit-for-tat negotiations between the two sides (see Figure 2), with both parties adhering to their position, only giving in as far as the other side and ultimately slowing down the process of unification. Both sides frequently threatened the other with quitting the process. Consequently, there was the possibility that the discussion process might not strike an agreement at all.

In addition to the use of the tit-for-tat strategy between the two opposing sides, other tactical moves were observed during the discussions. An outstanding behaviour in this MSI was the deviation of the third dairy's negotiation strategy from the expected behaviour: in contrast to the assumption that this dairy would support a low standard according to its lowest-costs strategy – where the possibility to market products at a high price is not given – the requirements of this dairy were in line with those of the NGOs who pled for a higher standard. Representatives of this dairy lobbied for a demanding sustainability standard with clearly defined requirements. Thus, they argued for a standard which should be explicitly higher than the Dutch standard (120/6). Against the background of consumer expectations regarding pasture-raised milk (Weinrich et al., 2016) and to maintain credibility, they further underlined the importance of criteria related to husbandry conditions and feeding of dairy cows, as well as seasonality of pasture-raised products to prevent consumer deception.

This argument for a high standard by the dairy following a cost-leadership strategy was unexpected and further complicated the discussion, slowing down the unification process. The strategy of this dairy is deemed as a 'prevention strategy' (see Figure 2) in this analysis. Its use could be explained by the fact that the dairy possibly does not want to produce pasture-raised milk, either according to a low standard or to a high standard. Both options could be too costly because the dairy only produces a low percentage of drinking milk; thus, it would not be worthwhile to establish a separate production line for pasture-raised milk. To protect the company from being excluded from a new market and to lower the chance for competitors in the milk market to offer pasture-raised milk, the dairy requested a high standard beyond the 120/6 criterion for pasture-raised milk even though it would not be able to fulfil this standard. Thus, this stakeholder used a strategy of hidden intention (O'Connor and Carneval, 1997) to prevent an agreement on a low standard because this could be implemented by rival dairies with lower costs and effort, and could thus threaten the competitiveness of its own milk

products on the market. It is known that firms which exhibit high market power tend to reject innovations that could threaten the market share of their own products (Frooman, 1999). Products that are produced according to a higher standard normally remain in a niche market (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010) and thus gain relatively little market share. Nevertheless, the use of a 'prevention strategy' and the tactic of hidden intention (as observed in the MSI for pasture-raised milk) are not mentioned in the literature in this way and this is a new finding in the context of analysing negotiation strategies in MSIs.

Within the course of the MSI, the position of the dairy following a cost leadership strategy – the 'inhibitor's' position – was indirectly supported by other stakeholders, such as the NGOs which also demanded a higher standard to achieve their aims. Thus, the inhibitor could use the ambitions of achieving a higher standard, as well as the risk of the public accusation of 'green washing' in the case of the implementation of a lower standard along with a loss of reputation, as a tool to pursue its goals. In this case, the MSI itself provides a platform for the inhibitor to prevent an agreement (Rahwan et al., 2003; Fransen and Kolk, 2007; Groth, 2012) and, therefore, the success of the discussion. This is another novel and potentially important finding in the field of multi-stakeholder research because the expected stakeholders' positions influenced the approach of different stakeholders within the discussion process.

Through the unexpected behaviour of the dairy following a cost leadership strategy, the power balance in the MSI was influenced and disturbed (Adler and Silverstein, 2000). This negatively affected the entire discussion process because most participants assumed a feint, which increased the scepticism towards the whole process (Roloff, 2008a). Therefore, associations intending to build social sustainability should focus on searching and generating a 'win-win-balance' among the actors involved. Power between stakeholders should be balanced, otherwise power shifts may occur in favour of only one side. As could be observed here with one dairy using its market power, power shifts often occur in favour of the economic side (Boström, 2006). This situation along with increased scepticism between stakeholders can result in tensions or even non-resolvable conflicts that hardly make an agreement possible (Galuppo et al., 2014). However, the use of a strategy of hidden intention was not successful in the long run of the MSI because the inhibiting stakeholder lost credibility and finally gave in. In the end, all stakeholders were generally willing to commit themselves to the implementation of a label for pasture-raised milk – including a unified standard. Thus, unification was more relevant than the goals of individual stakeholders. Furthermore, the final agreement also resulted from political pressure on the one side and

pressure through increasing endeavours regarding pasture-raised milk standards in other countries on the other side. For the inhibitor, it was finally more important to support a mutual standard than to be excluded from further discussions, although this comparably lower standard might threaten the market share of its own products. This is especially true as the feasibility of the criteria for the production of pasture-raised milk according to a label standard remains uncertain for the inhibitor.

In the end, the inhibiting dairy did not prevent an agreement on the 120/6 standard. The general 120/6 criterion can be seen as a compromise between all stakeholders after a long, complex and controversial discussion process, establishing a mutual basis for the stakeholder network. Furthermore, this standard had already been established and tested by some dairies and therefore can be seen as a 'de facto standard'. Finally, it can be concluded that the MSI: 1) resulted in a rather low standard regarding sustainability claims, and 2) unification was only achieved after remarkable time delays, thus 3) the MSI was overtaken regarding pasture-raised milk by non-involved retailers which created own company-specific labels according to the 'de facto standard'. This illustrates the outstanding power of retail as gatekeeper, at the same time lowering the chances for a higher sustainability standard for pasture-raised milk (Burch and Lawrence, 2005).

## **6 Conclusion**

This article can be viewed as a case study, reporting from a MSI dealing with a case of sustainability as a 'wicked problem'. Uncovering a strategy of hidden intention in a MSI on the economic side suggests an enriched model of stakeholder interests in MSIs beyond the classical model of confrontation between economy and NGOs. Furthermore, the strategy of one dairy lobbying for a higher standard than expected cannot be explained in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) concepts, pioneering in promoting sustainability, or by the approach of creating shared value for economy and public (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Rather, the interpretation of this strategy suggests a higher complexity of MSIs. The observed behaviour of hidden intention is unexpected, and this is a new finding in the field of multi-stakeholder analyses. It results in new possible positions for economic stakeholders, at least in the context of agri-food systems. Beyond the possibility that stakeholders might plead for a low standard due to economic reasons or may plead for a high standard due to CSR pioneering, there must be considered the possibility of a strategy 1) trying to prevent an agreement at all ('prevention strategy') in a MSI, or at least 2) attempting to push competitors

into niche segments, which might be deemed as a 'suppression strategy'. Here, further research, investigating other MSIs in terms of the complex network of interaction of different stakeholders and their interests, positions and strategies, is needed. Influential stakeholders might use their power in similar processes to try to inhibit unification, and their success is dependent on the respective stakeholder network. This should be considered for other MSIs dealing with questions of sustainability to enhance the efficiency of the discussions, and to avoid failing of MSIs.

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Die Wurzeln der **Fakultät für Agrarwissenschaften** reichen in das 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Mit Ausgang des Wintersemesters 1951/52 wurde sie als siebente Fakultät an der Georgia-Augusta-Universität durch Ausgliederung bereits existierender landwirtschaftlicher Disziplinen aus der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät etabliert.

1969/70 wurde durch Zusammenschluss mehrerer bis dahin selbständiger Institute das **Institut für Agrarökonomie** gegründet. Im Jahr 2006 wurden das Institut für Agrarökonomie und das Institut für RURALE ENTWICKLUNG zum heutigen **Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE ENTWICKLUNG** zusammengeführt.

Das Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE ENTWICKLUNG besteht aus insgesamt neun Lehrstühlen zu den folgenden Themenschwerpunkten:

- Agrarpolitik
- Betriebswirtschaftslehre des Agribusiness
- Internationale Agrarökonomie
- Landwirtschaftliche Betriebslehre
- Landwirtschaftliche Marktlehre
- Marketing für Lebensmittel und Agrarprodukte
- Soziologie Ländlicher Räume
- Umwelt- und Ressourcenökonomik
- Welternährung und rurale Entwicklung

In der Lehre ist das Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE ENTWICKLUNG führend für die Studienrichtung Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften des Landbaus sowie maßgeblich eingebunden in die Studienrichtungen Agribusiness und Ressourcenmanagement. Das Forschungsspektrum des Departments ist breit gefächert. Schwerpunkte liegen sowohl in der Grundlagenforschung als auch in angewandten Forschungsbereichen. Das Department bildet heute eine schlagkräftige Einheit mit international beachteten Forschungsleistungen.

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