



Alternative pathways to sustainability? Comparing forest governance models[☆]



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1. Introduction

Many forest producing nations and regions experience that their forests are faced with growing and conflicting demands. Forests have long been valued for providing biodiversity, helping to regulate the world's climate, offering soil protection and for their role in the production of a wide range of wood and non-wood products (McDermott et al., 2010). In addition, forests are increasingly seen as having a key role in climate change adaptation (Keskitalo et al., 2016), mitigation and in the transition to renewable energy sources (Beland Lindahl and Westholm, 2012; Nilsson, 2015). However, despite facing similar difficult trends and challenges, different nations and regions seem to be responding in different ways (see contributions to this special issue). In this paper we compare how the various forest governance models explored in this special issue respond to pressing sustainability challenges. As outlined in the introduction, we have selected seven national and regional models that illustrate different potential ways for nations to make trade-offs and prioritize between goals. The models come from Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Germany (Lower Saxony), Brazil and Canada. These are all large forest-producing countries and the relevant data is easily accessible. We hope that by comparing and exchanging experiences and knowledge, learning in the field of forest governance can be enhanced.

As explained in the introduction, our focus on forest governance models speaks both to the forest governance and forest policy literature. Arts (2012) and Wiersum et al. (2013) show how forest policy sciences have gone through several theoretical shifts, moving from forest policy praxis to forest policy analysis, and from analytical to critical forest policy analysis. Whereas instrument choice and institutional arrangements are at the centre of attention in rational and institutional approaches, critical approaches focus on forest discourse and how the construction of meaning shapes politics and power relations (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Wiersum et al., 2013). Indeed, there is now a burgeoning literature focusing on the role of discourse in forest governance and forest policy change (e.g. Arts, 2014;

Böcher et al., 2008; Pülzl et al., 2014; Winkel and Sotirov, 2014; Winkel, 2014). Arts et al. (2013) take this further by arguing that an interpretive, micro-sociological “practice based” approach is needed to understand the complex relationships between institutions, actors and outcomes on the ground. Others maintain that the formal and informal aspects of conventional political analysis address much of this critique (e.g. Krott and Giessen, 2014). In this paper, we explore if, and how, a Pathways Approach may help to fill some of the theoretical gaps that we believe remain in the literature.

Another debated issue is how to compare national and regional forest governance. Much global-scale comparative research on forest policy has focused on the broad macro-level goals and objectives of national and international programmes and settings (Howlett and Rayner, 2006; Dimitrov, 2005; Humphreys, 2006). While this work has been important in advancing explanations for the goals governing domestic and global forest policy development, the micro-level dynamics and responses beyond static evaluations of compliance have received less attention (McDermott et al., 2009; Bernstein and Cashore, 2012; Arts et al., 2013). McDermott et al. (2010) have partly filled this gap by conducting a systematic, large-scale comparison of the regulation of commercial wood harvests, i.e. country level forest policy measures, in 20 case study countries. Another large-scale comparison of on-the-ground performance is that of Gustafsson et al. (2012) who investigate the ecological role and practices of retention forestry. Valuable though all this work is, to get a fuller picture of the state of forests and policies in various countries and regions it is also important to consider forest dynamics and the pathways promoting different avenues of change (Arts and Babili, 2013). Perceptions of sustainable forest management and development are critical components of such pathways (Beland Lindahl et al., 2015b; Beland Lindahl et al., 2017–in this issue).

The theoretical framework for this special issue draws on the STEPS (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) Pathways Approach (Leach et al., 2010) and frame analysis (Schön and Rein 1994; Perri 6 2005; Beland Lindahl 2008; Beland Lindahl et al., 2013). We argue that this approach has important contributions to offer comparative forest governance research, and that it helps bridge the apparently separate areas of ideas, institutions, actors and outcomes. In the following sections, we further develop our theoretical framework, outline the methods used for comparison and synthesis, present our empirical results, and conclude by discussing our findings.

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2. Theory

The contributions of this special issue were guided by a set of questions that are derived from the Pathways Approach as developed by Leach et al. (2010, see introduction). However, when subject to empirical application, some of the questions proved more useful and applicable than others. In fact, the entire set of questions turned out to be too broad and all-inclusive to apply in a single study, thus jeopardizing the authors' ambition to follow the entire policy process from the generation of ideas and goals through to their implementation and the resulting outcomes. In response to these shortcomings, Beland Lindahl et al. (2015a) and Sandström et al. (2016) developed a refined and more focused analytical framework based on a more specific frame analysis and four overarching questions about problem formulation, policy goals, implementation strategies and assessment of outcomes (see Fig. 1). This refined version of the original set of questions Approach has guided the following comparison of different national and regional forest governance models.

Leach et al. (2010, p. 122) stress the need to “broaden out” inputs, i.e. improve inclusiveness in terms of different actors and perspectives, and “open up” the outputs, i.e. increase the range of alternative options. “Closing down” outputs, in contrast, involves highlighting a small subset of possible actions or policy choices (Leach et al., 2010, p. 105. Compare “discursive openings” and “closures” in Ångman, 2013). These concepts are used to illuminate principal differences in how the governance systems under study handle policy input, output and the task of making trade-offs. To handle challenges to sustainability, governance models also need to deal with change in its multifarious forms, ranging from immediate shock-induced change to that which results from longer-term stresses and strains. One short-term response is to try to “control” change. A more long-term response is to “respond” to it in a dynamic way. Leach et al. (2010) identify four possible response strategies: “Stability” (control as a way to handle shock); “Resilience” (dynamic response as a way to

handle shock); “Durability” (control as a way to handle stress); and “Robustness” (dynamic response as a way to handle stress). According to Leach et al. (2010), most governance models are designed to handle immediate shocks, e.g. establishing fire suppression systems (a “Stability” response) or planting mixed species to increase forest resilience in case of storms (a “Resilience” response). However, due to political myopia, governance models are generally less able to handle long-term stress. Whereas “Durability” responses concern events which potentially may be controlled (provided we have complete knowledge about their probability for example), “Robustness” responses concern issues where the drivers are beyond political control and responses require as yet unknown and fundamental political changes. The particular strategies promoted in response to change and the extent to which they focus on dealing with immediate shocks and/or more deep-seated stresses through control or dynamic responses, are important to an analysis of the capacity of a specific model to handle challenges to sustainability.

In this paper we use the theoretical approach described above to compare seven national and regional forest governance models in terms of alternative, possibly competing, pathways to sustainability. We use the concepts ecological modernization and sustainable development to illuminate principal differences between the pathways that we have identified. However, in line with Langehelle (2000), this analysis departs from the view that there are essential differences between the two concepts. Ecological modernization is a theory of social change that explores attempts in Northern industrial societies to respond to the negative environmental impacts of modernization without the course of action being completely redirected, for example by retaining the notion of progress based on economic growth (Langehelle, 2000; Baker, 2007). In contrast, a strategy of sustainable development based on the original Brundtland formulation (WCED, World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) recognizes that there are biophysical limits to growth, acknowledges the responsibility of present

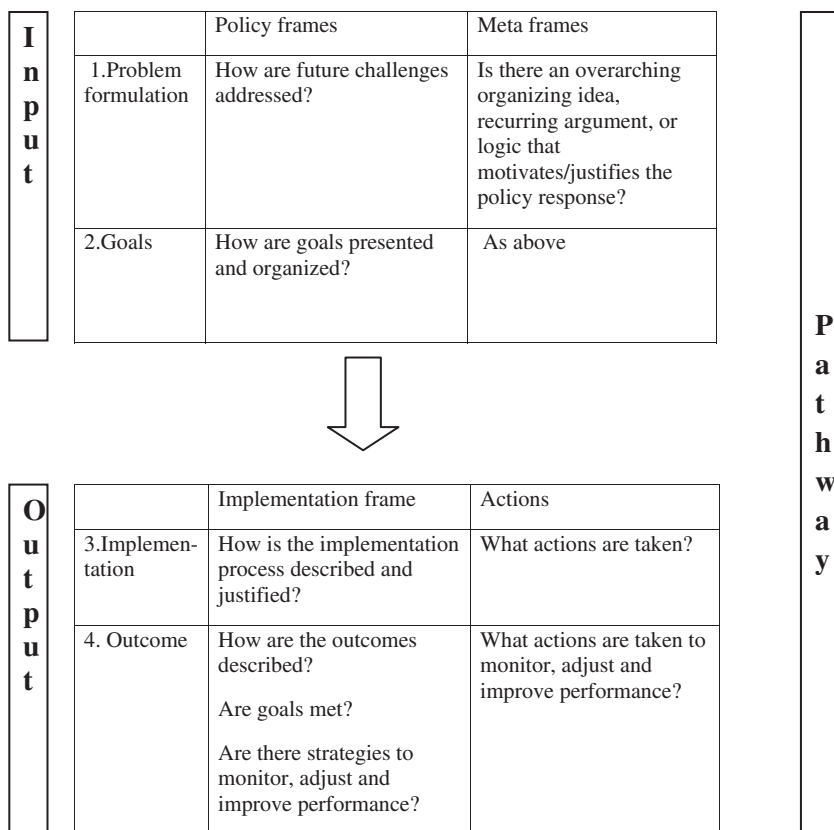


Fig. 1. Framework for analysis.

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