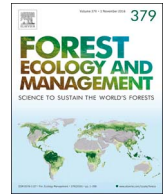




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Prioritising stakeholder engagement for forest health, across spatial, temporal and governance scales, in an era of austerity

Rehema M. White^{a,*}, Juliette Young^b, Mariella Marzano^c, Sharon Leahy^a

^a School of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, Irvine Building, St Andrews, Fife, Scotland KY16 9AJ, United Kingdom

^b Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik, Midlothian EH26 0QB, United Kingdom

^c Forest Research, Northern Research Station, Roslin, Scotland EH25 9SY, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Tree health is a major concern for forest managers as well as others who enjoy the benefits of trees, woods and forests. We know that stakeholder engagement can help define what people find important about forests and woodlands, assist in the development of better management approaches, enhance buy-in of strategies proposed and create a stronger democratic dialogue. However, tree health offers particular challenges for stakeholder engagement because of the wide range of stakeholders potentially involved and budget tightening under economic austerity. Stakeholders are present at different spatial scales (local, place specific; regional; national and international) and need to be engaged cyclically and over different temporal scales, sometimes in immediate decision making but also in planning over longer timescales, for which decisions have implications for woodlands in the long term future. Hence, we need to know not only with whom we *could* engage, but also with whom we *must* engage. Our research questions are: with whom, why and how should we engage across spatial, temporal and governance scales and with limited resources to achieve philosophical and practical goals regarding tree health? How do we prioritise engagement efforts to obtain 'best value'? We undertook two tree health projects, both using and investigating the concept of 'stakeholder engagement' in the UK: (1) exploring the concept of resilience with tree health stakeholders; (2) exploring how stakeholder engagement could enhance technology development for the early detection of tree pests and pathogens. We carried out interviews and experiential interactive activities and ran workshops and collaborative field trips with a range of stakeholders. We found that mapping stakeholders identified a complex network of hybrid individuals and roles overlaid on a projectscape that spanned multiple research and practice initiatives. It was clear that as well as undertaking discrete engagement activities, it was important to develop ongoing collaborative conversations, facilitated through networks and alliances. Stakeholder engagement was more effective when interactive, innovative or experiential means were employed. There was a tension between recognition of the value of communication and the time and resources required for engagement. Whilst the state is attempting to devolve responsibility, structural constraints, resource restrictions and knowledge gaps are limiting the capacity of others to fulfil these expectations. It was concluded that, despite economic austerity, investment is required to support relationships and networks, promoting normative and substantive forms of engagement and countering the audit culture, rather than focusing merely on instrumental, easily measurable, short term gains.

1. Introduction

1.1. Tree health and biosecurity

Tree health has been a global concern especially over the past decade, with increasing globalisation, international trade, climate change and changes in social practice increasing invasion and risk and spread of new pests and pathogens (Marzano et al., 2017). Environmental management requires stakeholder engagement (Blackstock

et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2009) and this is especially true for tree health, which requires integration of different kinds of knowledge and has both specific, short term impacts and long term consequences that affect a wide range of stakeholders whose livelihoods, recreation, places or cultures are affected. For example, whilst pest invasions may require action against a new pest or disease to be taken within hours or days (Dandy et al. (2017)), subsequent planting decisions can have consequences several decades later as trees mature. In this paper we draw on two tree health projects in the UK to develop insights into

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: rehema.white@st-andrews.ac.uk (R.M. White), jyo@ceh.ac.uk (J. Young), Mariella.marzano@forestry.gsi.gov.uk (M. Marzano), sl65@st-andrews.ac.uk (S. Leahy).

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stakeholder engagement against a background of multi-level governance, with limited time and resources. With the presumption that resources allocated for engagement will be limited, we seek in this paper to identify how we might prioritise stakeholder engagement across spatial and temporal scales in an era of austerity and audit.

The UK has experienced significant recent pest and pathogen impacts on forests and has responded with increased research (funded by national research councils) and policy (at UK and devolved state levels) initiatives on which we can reflect for future UK and wider geographical contexts. Over the past few years, UK tree health policy has promoted engagement with mainstream stakeholders (DEFRA, 2014) but mapping of tree health stakeholders demonstrates a complex landscape of individuals and organisations (Marzano et al., 2015; Dandy et al. (2017); Marzano et al., in press). Research to date has focused on who has a stake, how stakes can change over time and some impacts of engagement. There is less information suggesting what form of stakeholder engagement is most effective, and how agencies that are suffering significant constraints may allocate limited resources to maximise impact. A combination of fora for collective interaction and group specific tools can support engagement, but individuals express limited opportunity to interact with all engagement opportunities (Marzano et al., in press). Whilst there have been some awareness raising campaigns, these have rarely been evaluated and there is little empirical evidence in the tree health sector to support the belief that face to face contact is key to effective engagement (Marzano et al., 2015).

1.2. Prioritising stakeholder engagement

The practical constraints of spatial, temporal and governance scales, fiscal austerity and audit demands within and across state, agency, organisational and project groups responsible for engagement mean that these groups (including researchers such as ourselves) will need to prioritise and defend engagement strategies that are pragmatic and achieve value for resources. We must make tough decisions about why, who, how to engage; what do we wish from our engagement; how much is enough? This paper explores these challenges using tree health as an area of enquiry.

Whilst there is research demonstrating which stakeholders have an interest and responsibility in tree health (Marzano et al., 2015; Dandy et al. (2017); Marzano et al., in press), stakeholder engagement still holds challenges for those with a mandate to engage. In practice, there are resource constraints around management decision making and implementation. The era of austerity in UK has squeezed most public budgets further, demanding that government and public agency staff defend time and cost investment in participation activities. The research impact agenda in UK reflects a demand for socially accountable research, causing more researchers to establish stakeholder communication, or at least active dissemination of results and hence increasing the opportunity for engagement with non-academic stakeholders, but also generating some perverse outcomes and sometimes questionable modes of engagement (Martin, 2011).

Hence we need to know not only with whom we *could* engage, but also with whom we *must* engage; we need to ask questions not only about why, whom and how we must engage but also explore engagement methods that offer value for money and explore the possibility for shared, integrated forms of stakeholder engagement. These questions are valid both for statutory agencies with an obligation to implement policy and for researchers seeking to widen inquiry regarding tree health theory and practice, as will be discussed later.

1.3. Participation and stakeholder engagement: Rationale and challenges

It is widely accepted that participation of relevant stakeholders is desirable in environmental management (Beierle and Konisky, 2000; Stringer et al., 2006; Reed, 2008), but in practice there are challenges in

determining optimum forms of participation and in theory there are potential concerns about philosophy, intention and implementation. There has been a shift from top down approaches, dominated by a western scientific paradigm, towards more decentralised modes permitting diverse views of the environment and different management approaches (Beierle and Konisky, 2000; Kapoor, 2001). Participation in environmental decision making is seen to be a democratic right (for example: the 1998 Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters), placing an obligation on those developing decisions (policy makers), implementing policy (practitioners and agencies) and producing and exchanging academic knowledge that could inform decisions and management (researchers). Support for participation by these actors derives from the understanding that participation delivers a number of advantages, including instrumental (assisting with practical implementation and defusing conflict), substantive (highlighting multiple perspectives which leads to better understanding and selection of appropriate solutions) and normative (social and individual learning enriches participants and wider society) benefits (Blackstock et al., 2007). However, there has been some disillusionment and critique of participation processes, including a focus on minority interests to the detriment of the wider public (eg (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and the implementation and management of participation within environmental management can be complex, often requiring pragmatic trade offs (Porth et al., 2015).

Participation is a concept used to incorporate different forms of engagement within environmental management. Early definitions outlined differences between tokenism (information, consultation), involvement and empowerment as the degree of participation intensified (Arnstein, 1969). Public participation is still understood to span different forms of participation from communication with stakeholders (including general communication with the wider public or specific sectors of the public) to meaningful input by stakeholders (often specific groups) (Rowe and Frewer, 2000). More recently, we have seen diverse forms of empowering participation promoted, such as collaboration (Davies and White, 2012), co-design (White and van Koten, 2016) and partnership (Leach et al., 2002). Broadly, whilst more intense forms of participation may deliver greater empowerment and benefits (Reed, 2008), they are also resource intensive in terms of time and resources (human, institutional and financial) (Kapoor, 2001), both by facilitators and participants. Participation goals may also differ depending on purposes of participation, and on ethical and normative choices as well as practical cost implications (Lynam et al., 2007); whether a project is in design, implementation or dissemination of results phase; whether for research or management; the scale of the project, programme or policy; and the anticipated response (consensus or conflict).

Participation can incorporate broad public participation, including participant driven voices in environmental decision making (Rowe and Frewer, 2000). However, 'stakeholder participation' includes more specifically those who are affected by or can affect a decision; and environmental managers and researchers often focus more directly on these groups rather than on the wider public (Reed, 2008). The participants in such initiatives may include, but generally go beyond, 'community participation'. 'Stakeholder engagement' is the active solicitation of participation by those coordinating policy, practice, or research in a particular field. As with the notion of participation, it is not an unproblematic term. The definition of 'stakeholder' is complex, the term being developed for business management and generally being understood as an individual or organisation with an interest in an issue; often as affecting or being affected by the issue (Prell et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2009; Dandy et al. (2017)). However, there has long been debate over the extent to which a stakeholder can be defined only in terms of an instrumental role with an issue or as a moral being with individual views and the propensity to act in relation to an issue (e.g. Freeman, 1994). The latter view thus provokes consideration of whether and how

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