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Orchestration in political processes: Involvement of experts, citizens, and participatory professionals in forest policy making

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A B S T R A C T

The overarching aim of this review paper is to investigate the involvement of experts, citizens, and participatory professionals in forest policy decision-making processes. Three interpretations of governance are distinguished to translate the idea of an orchestra to European (forest) policy making processes, referring to Frank Fischer's differentiation between a centralised state guided by administrative and policy experts on the one hand and deliberative governance driven by citizen participation on the other and a form of governance by participation professionals. The review included in total 81 research articles published between 1998 and 2015 addressing participation and expert involvement in forest policy. The results show that governance by participatory professionals is clearly visible in forest policy making processes in Europe mainly involving traditional groups as forest owners. Whether these participation professionals are engaged in a deliberative process with citizens remains unanswered. The results furthermore show a strong involvement of experts though the literature is rather silent as to how this steering of experts evolves in participatory forest processes. Finally the analysis shows that governance by citizen participation is rather neglected in forest policy processes in Europe. It is perceived as difficult to pursue, even at the local level. Therefore this article found nearly no empirical evidence for a so-called citizen's orchestra with the competence to self-align by deliberation. Instead citizens seem to be no part of the orchestra itself, but remain outside as part of the audience.

"I mean, the great secret is that an orchestra can actually play without a conductor at all. Of course, a great conductor will have a concept and will help them play together and unify them."

Joshua Bell¹

1. Introduction

This paper has been developed during the COST action FP1207 on forest policy entitled ORCHESTRA. The word orchestra initially brings to mind a concerted action resulting in a harmony that yields a wonderful end result. This is a situation that mirrors what could be achieved by forest policy decision making, which is known to be confronted by a multitude of at least partly conflicting interests. Hence, we have taken

the name and concept of an orchestra literally and used it to frame our paper. With this in mind we distinguish three interpretations of governance to translate the idea of an orchestra to European (forest) policy making processes. We do so by referring to Frank Fischer's differentiation between a centralised state guided by administrative and policy experts on the one hand and deliberative governance driven by citizen participation on the other.

The term 'orchestra' is used for a large instrumental ensemble lead by a conductor directing their performance, thus orchestrating the orchestra. Transferring this pictorial concept to decision-making processes our first classification of governance is a process of decision making where one actor or a small group of actors acting as one (conductor) steers the process harmonising the diverse interests on forests in the best possible way. The relationship between the conductor

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¹ National Public Radio Music, Interview with J.Bell, April 24, 2012: Retrieved 15 December 2016 from: <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/24/151294671/classical-rock-star-bell-takes-on-conducting>

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and the orchestra can be described as hierarchical or authoritarian, where the attributed knowledge and skills of the conducting expert “is needed to render the competent decisions required for effective social guidance” (Fischer, 2009, 54). Here an orchestra is interpreted as traditional technocratic governmental policy making pursued by an elite group of experts which supposedly have the required knowledge and skills (Fischer, 2009), a form of orchestration we will later refer to as (i) governance by experts.

The citation from Joshua Bell, an American violinist and conductor, at the beginning of this paper offers another view on the workings of an orchestra. The musicians themselves have the competence to play in such a way that their individual parts are so harmonised that the role of the conductor is merely supportive. Transferring this interpretation to the world of governance generates an arena of actors with diverse interests that are able to achieve results in a bottom-up process rather than being steered from the top-down. It can represent a model of governance where the general “citizenry, or at least a significant portion of it, is (...) capable of making informed, intelligent assessment about public issues”. This second form of orchestration is understood as supporting the general premise of democracy which understands knowledge as “(...) a product of interaction among competing views” (Fischer, 2003, 16) and is therefore referred to as (ii) citizen participation in deliberative governance.

The concept of ‘participatory governance’ (Grote and Gbikpi, 2002; Newig and Kvarda, 2012) when addressed to questions of involvement and citizenship in political decision making is strongly connected to the capacity and competence of the citizenry and their representatives to competently judge different issues (ibid.). The validity of being able to positively support such a position is strongly contested in political science. Some authors perceive such participation as detrimental to effective policy decisions hinting at missing competence and knowledge. Others regard it as an alternative to elitism in policy making and therefore providing a basis for a stronger democracy going beyond mere representation and voting (Fischer, 2009). Fischer (2009) understands technocratic, traditional governmental policy making built on expert knowledge as antagonistic to citizen participation. He acknowledges that the increasing complexity of societies and the governance issues facing them seems to require specialised expert advice. He however suspects that professional expertise can also work “as a barrier to meaningful citizen participation” (ibid., 30) referring to Berube (1996, 15) who harshly characterised experts as “arrogant, exclusive, self-serving, money-grabbing, careerists – and they purchase their status by discrediting everybody else as ‘amateurs’.” Fischer goes on to argue that experts alone are not always able to solve complex problems and furthermore emphasises that they are not neutral hence stressing the value of citizen participation in this second classification of deliberative governance.

Given the promising symbolism of an orchestra for policy making it is not surprising that the term has already been used in political science however, thus far the use has been limited to studies on international political processes. Abbott et al. (2015) concentrated on the role of international governmental organisations in orchestration. They present a third interpretation of the picture of an orchestra by distinguishing between the orchestrator (conductor of the orchestra) and the intermediary (a set of actors) that steers another set of actors. They describe the process of orchestration as an indirect and soft governance model as there is no hard control over the activities of the intermediaries. An orchestrator is therefore not a political decision maker, but influences political decision-making processes by making different elements work together in a more aligned fashion. This interpretation differs from the above mentioned second classification in so far as it represents a governance approach that isolates one group, the intermediaries, to achieve concerted action through indirect coordinative activity of lower level actors without having the option of employing sanctions for non-compliance. Fischer refers to those intermediaries as civil society which enables citizens, through groups, to “engage in free,

egalitarian discussion with one another. In effect these civil society groups, in particular NGOs”, “constitute new forms of social and political engagement” (Fischer, 2009, 70). We classify this third form of orchestration for the national context as (iii) governance by participatory professionals. In the forest policy making context such professionals are primarily drawn from forest owners associations, environmental NGOs as well as forest industry groups.

We chose to use these three forms of classification of the functioning of an orchestra (i) governance by experts, (ii) citizen participation in deliberative governance and (iii) governance by participatory professionals as basic categories to review the extent to which participation is taking place in forest policy decision-making and which form and concept of participation dominates. This enables an understanding of what kind of shift from government to governance has occurred as discussed some two decades ago in policy sciences (e.g. Pierre and Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1996). This shift away from the “one-way-traffic” of the state towards “two-way-traffic” (Kooimann, 1993) involving non-state actors in political decision-making processes has already resulted in a multitude of empirical as well as normative aspects touched upon in scholarly work. Designs for the involvement of non-state actors as well as criteria and indicators for evaluating this involvement were identified in the past and accompanying problems revealed with the prominent paper on the ladder of citizen participation by Arnstein (1969) paving the way in this regard. Scholarly work on the orchestrated involvement of experts, citizens, and professionals has proliferated ever since. Numerous studies on who is involved, how that involvement is enacted in decision-making processes, and how it is linked to policies have been undertaken (Fung, 2006). In a similar vein many of these issues and features were also dealt with in forest policy research. A comprehensive and modern review of the involvement of experts, citizens and professionals in European forest policy-making processes is however missing. We know they are acting as an orchestra but we are unsure of exactly how well they are doing it or even if they are all playing the same piece of music. With that in mind, this paper has the clear overarching aim to fill that gap and investigate the involvement of experts, citizens, and participatory professionals in those processes.

Since a comprehensive review of the multitudes of European forest policy-making processes cannot be practicably done, this paper is based on a literature review. For analytical reasons this review paper delineates between experts, citizens and participation professionals acknowledging that this differentiation is somewhat subjective as the borders between these groups are blurred, e.g. each group possesses a certain amount of expertise not just the experts, however experts are citizens as well. We avoid the term stakeholders as experts and citizens present also specific types of stakeholders and therefore this categorisation seems less than helpful to distinguish among them. The term is only used if the reviewed literature directly refer to stakeholders. We instead we employ the term participatory professionals to indicate that those are organised civil society groups in forest policy making processes which are familiar with procedures underlying those decision making processes and at the same time sharing norms and values in their groups. These groups can differ among others a great deal not only concerning their specific interest but as well concerning their level of professionalism and organisation, the (non-)engagement of their members and whether or not they represent public interest.

For the sake of clarity this paper is organised in the following form: after briefly presenting the methodology for assessing the material, results from the review are expounded in three sections. Firstly, the meaning of participation is assessed; secondly results from the literature review concerning the involvement of experts, citizens, and participatory professionals are presented. In the final part of the results section literature findings on the interplay between the different groups are presented. In the concluding sections of the paper, the results are discussed in relation to the three outlined interpretations of governance.

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