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'What's in it for me?' – Contrasting environmental organisations and forest owner participation as policies evolve

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder participation in forest policy processes has over years received political and scientific attention. This empirical study brings in a dynamic element, exploring how and why participation change as policies evolve. Two Norwegian policy cases serve to contrast participation by environmental organisations (ENGOS) and forest owner organisations (FOs) over time. The policy arrangement approach (PAA) is used as analytical framework, first, to explore changes in coalitions, rules of game, power constellations, and discourses for each of the policy cases. Second, an initial exploration is offered on how changes in the PAA dimensions affect the assessments of 'what's in it for me' for ENGOS versus FOs. The results indicate that when standards for sustainable forest management are implemented, the value for ENGOS to participate in standard revision is decreasing, while in forest protection, the ENGOS chose to participate in a coalition requesting more money for voluntary protection, even after being excluded from identifying interesting areas for protection. Combining evolving policies and participation based on 'what's in it for me' help explain why participation changes over time. The findings provide alternative perspectives on former work presenting continued participation as a challenge and important messages related to future forest policy analysis.

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1. Introduction

Stakeholder participation in forest policy processes has over years received political and scientific attention. While participation have long traditions in Nordic countries, the diversity of interests among stakeholders increased as the forest objectives broadened up with the elaborations of sustainable forest management (SFM). The statement that "Forest resources and forest lands should be sustainably managed to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations" (UNCED, 1992; Rio Forest principles: Principles/Elements 2(b)) was followed by a recommendation that "Governments should promote and provide opportunities for the participation of interested parties, including local communities and indigenous people, industries, labor, non-governmental organizations and individuals, forest dwellers and women, in the development, implementation and planning of national forest policies" (UNCED, 1992; Rio Forest principles: Principles/Elements 2(d), United Nations, UN, 1992).

Numerous studies exist of stakeholder participation in forest policy processes, and developments described as change from government to governance. Appelstrand (2002: 281) discussed challenges for lawmakers and policy practitioners in "finding consensus in diversity" and blending of "multiple management objectives" while highlighting

the value of including lay knowledge and subjective perceptions from the public. Kangas et al. (2010) explored stakeholder perspectives on proper participation in regional forest programmes. They identified three interlinked challenges to improve participatory processes: (i) how to motivate relevant participants to contribute; (ii) how to commit to what is agreed, to avoid confusion in the group; and (iii) how to run process, so participants will consider their time spent as well worth the efforts (Kangas et al., 2010: 220). Along the same line, Faehnle and Tyrväinen (2013) state that meaningful participation, from the point of view of actors, relates to 'what's in it for me'. In parallel to work discussing ways to ensure and improve participation, other studies point to challenges in participation and 'participation fatigue'. For example, Wesselink et al. (2011:2689) in natural resource management "suggest that some of the 'participation fatigue' can be explained by the differences in expectations regarding participation" between those involved in participatory processes and experts organising or conducting research on participation.

This empirical paper builds on these studies, and takes as a starting point that stakeholders will spend time and resources only on policy areas and processes where they consider participation meaningful. The focus in the following is on how 'what's in it for me', i.e. the meaningfulness of participation in policy processes, develops as the policies evolve. Dynamic aspects of participation is investigated, contrasting involvement by environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOS) and forest owners' organisations (FOs) in two forest policy

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processes in Norway. The overall aim is to combine empirical evidence of changing participation with broader conceptual discussions of meaningfulness of participation.

The objective is to elaborate on how and why participation change as policies evolve. Employing the policy analysis approach (PAA) (Arts et al., 2006; Leroy and Arts, 2006) as analytical framework, participation by ENGOs and FOs in two forest policy processes over time is investigated in two steps. First, changes along the four PAA dimensions: coalitions, rules of the game, discourse and power relations, are described for the two policy cases. Second, why participation changes is explored contrasting 'what's in it for me' for ENGOs and FOs respectively as the policies evolve.

The following two sections present the material and method. Next, developments in the two policy cases are described, before changing participation by ENGO and FO in different coalitions over time is elaborated in light of changes in power relations, rules of the game and discourses. Finally, the results are discussed related to former and future work and conclusions drawn.

2. Material

This study focuses on two Norwegian forest policy processes with diverse and changing participation: "Living Forests", developing standards for sustainable forest management (SFM) and "voluntary protection", a new way to protect productive forests. These cases represent two prominent aspects of forest management: protection of productive forests and sustainable management of forests, and were selected as interesting cases to explore changing participation as policies evolve. The initial exploration is restricted to two stakeholder groups, ENGOs and FOs, selected for being important players in forest policy and management in general, as well as in the two policy processes of concern. The investigations cover the processes from the start to current, highlighting changes over time.

The motivation for investigating complexity and gradual changes in participation in the two processes by ENGOs and FOs grew from the author following national and international policy developments and debates over years, and conducting interviews with multiple national stakeholder groups for another project in 2013 (reported e.g. in Peters et al., 2015; Pezdevšek Malovrh et al., 2016). Interviews with ENGOs and FOs, and broader stakeholder groups in 2013, revealed divergent opinions of the developments and collaborations between environmental and economic interests within the two policy processes. The way stakeholders described the collaborations over time, triggered the question of how and why the motivation for ENGOs versus FOs to participate in the processes changes as the policies evolve.

Empirical data for the analysis, describing developments in the two policy processes, including how participation changes, stem from a variety of written sources supplemented by interview data. Changes and developments in the two processes are taken from policy documents (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, MoA, 1998; Ministry of Environment, MoE, 2003). Two evaluations, one of the Living Forest process and the Norwegian standards for SFM (Arnesen et al., 2004) and one of the working method of voluntary forest protection (Skjeggedal et al., 2010), as well as information from interviews among national stakeholders conducted by the author for studies on closely related topics, also provided information on the process evolutions. Furthermore, statements, letters and news coverage, a diverse range of secondary sources and participatory observations by the author of national and international forest policy processes over years have provided information on developments as well as perceptions among different actors. The cases represent divergent trends regarding stakeholder participation over time, and thus interesting cases for exploring how stakeholders with different objectives, here ENGOs and FOs, act and react at different times of developments.

Specific for the second, explorative part of the analysis, changes in 'what's in it for me' on the side of stakeholders, two semi-structured interviews were conducted for COST Action FP1207 "ORCHESTRA" Working Group 3. As for interviews conducted by the author in 2013 (see above), all interviews were conducted face-to-face using semi-structured questions. In line with the interview guide developed for Orchestra WG3, the main focus was on how the two central representatives, one from ENGO, one from FO, considered their own and other's participation, as well as their assessment of the participation over time. From the stories told by ENGO and FO (2015 interview ENGO; 2015 interview FO), respectively, on how the processes changed from a true collaboration on developing standards for sustainable forest management to revisions without ENGOs involved, and how FOs took over the role as initiating partner in processes to protect productive forests, the indirect assessments of 'what's in it for me' is constructed and elaborated in the following. The idea is that the differences between ENGOs and FOs in participation and assessment of participation over time provide an alternative perspective on the meaningfulness of participation, and that this perspective is essential for orchestrating policy analysis.

3. Method

To investigate developments in the Norwegian policy processes, the policy arrangement approach (PAA) (Arts et al., 2006; Leroy and Arts, 2006) serves as analytical framework. Leroy and Arts (2006) emphasized that the four PAA dimensions; coalitions, rules of the game, discourse and power relations, are equal sources of change and stability. Changes in any of these dimensions can lead to changes in the other: the actors involved in the policy domain, and their coalitions (including their oppositions); the division of resources between these actors, leading to differences in power and influence; the rules of the game within the policy arrangement, either in terms of formal procedures or as informal rules and 'routines' of interaction; and the policy discourses, entailing the norms and values, the definitions of problems and approaches to solutions of the actors involved.

The first step of the analysis is inspired by Arts and Buizer (2009) exploring changes in global forest governance. Developments in two national forest policy processes are investigated, focusing on changes and interactions in coalitions, rule of game, discourse and power. The dynamics in these four dimensions of policy arrangement analysis (PAA) (Arts et al., 2006) are explored, focusing on changes in participation and power as the overall policies evolve (with changing discourse and rules of the game). Following this paper's focus on participation by ENGOs and FOs – and changes therein – the involvement by these two stakeholder groups in the two processes and in related broader coalitions over time, is emphasized in the investigation. In this initial investigation, coalition(s) refer to involvement by ENGOs and FOs, respectively. Rules of the game are taken directly from the process developments, interpreted as the changes in how standards for SFM are developed and implemented as well as how productive forests are protected. Acknowledging that changing discourses and changes in power relations cannot be taken directly from any "face value", discourse is here interpreted as the common, dominant understanding of what SFM entails, while power is understood as the actors' ability to influence the policy developments.

The second step, the initial exploration of why participation changes as the policy evolves, combines developments along the four dimensions of PAA with former work stressing the importance of making participation worth the efforts (cf. e.g. Kangas et al., 2010; Faehnle and Tyrväinen, 2013). In line with the main objectives of this paper, the focus is on changing participation as policies evolve, contrasting 'what's in it for me' for ENGOs and FOs over time. This step aims at bringing the empirically based PAA results into a broader conceptual discussion of participation and policy development.

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