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# Participatory turn - and down-turn - in Finland's regional forest programme process

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## ABSTRACT

The study draws a synthesis of participation in the regional forest programme process (RFP) in Finland, based on the science of planning theory and on the empirical findings on RFP process. The paper describes five eras of participation: (1) the participatory-turn, when post-Rio programme model was initiated; (2) the creation and (3) establishment of RFP as a policy instrument that applies forest councils as deliberative forum, and is conducted synchronously with National Programmes. Many scientific studies focused on the RFP process in earlier phases raised scepticism on the capability of the institution to fully serve its purposes. Reconsideration of programme practices started by (4) a search of an “ideal model” for participation procedures, but ended up to the ongoing era that can be labelled either as a (5) participatory downturn or as a strategic-turn, depending on the political position regarding to forest programme, i.e. if the programme is viewed from the implementation or social choice approach. A praxis story of the paper demonstrates sceptical findings on potentials of normative planning studies to contribute sustainable changes in participatory forest policy processes. The central role of power is to be more properly understood in the forthcoming studies and institutional developments.

## 1. Introduction

In the science of forest policy, programmes have dual meanings. First, they refer, in general, to all policies defined through policy bargaining to achieve pre-defined objectives. Second, they refer to the specific policy instrument labelled as national/regional forest or forestry programmes to serve as an evolving basis for multi-level forest governance. The first meaning calls for the ‘implementation’ approach to be followed in forest policy analysis, and the second is the social choice approach (Mendes, 2006).

For the first perspective, Krott (2005, 23) defines forest policy programmes as follows: ‘A (forest) policy program[me] constitutes statements by (forest) stakeholders made in a social context concerning the utilization and/or protection of a forest’. Finland has a long tradition of programme implementation starting in the 1960s, when the statement pertained to a ‘progressive’ forestry, with the aim of increasing timber production and allocating of state funds for forest improvement works such as peatland drainage, forest road construction and fertilisation. This programme driven forest policy endured until the end of the 1980s, when the last forest programme of this type, then called the Forest 2000 programme, also included objectives for the multiple use of forests (Hyttinen and Tikkanen, 1999; Kotilainen and Rytteri, 2011). Those programmes were conducted in a harmonious atmosphere of a neocorporatist forest policy arena, i.e., in close co-

operation with the State, the forest industry and forest owners (Ollonqvist, 2002; Hänninen and Ollonqvist, 2002).

In the 1990s, for international environmental policy processes, milestone at the 1992 UNCED in Rio, the orientation towards forest programmes received new emphasis, which can be labelled a ‘participative turn’ in the long history of forest programming in Finnish forest policy (Ollonqvist, 2002), in line with the participatory turn in the European governance arena (Boussaguët, 2016; Saurugger, 2010). This provoked the occurrence of a rather radical change from implementation towards a social choice approach on forest programmes: the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel of Forests declared that national and sub-national forest programmes need appropriate participatory mechanisms (IPF, 1997a, b; Heino, 1998) that can result in sustainable and legitimate solutions for forest land use.

Indeed, for approximately two decades now, participatory forest programmes have been among the main policy instruments to enhance the sustainable use of forest resources, within global forest policy processes (e.g., Sepp and Mansur, 2006), which have correspondingly led to substantial changes in forest policy institutions and to the reformulation of programmes on all continents. In addition, scientific discussion on forest policy programmes have been diverse, particularly concerning National Forest Programmes (Carbone and Savelli, 2009; Winkel and Sotirov, 2011; Gislerud and Neven, 2002; Primmer and Kyllönen, 2006; Vainio and Paloniemi, 2012, Valkeapää and Karppinen,

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2013; Balest et al., 2016; Johansson 2016; Logmani et al. 2017). Some countries, including Finland, have also launched regional forest programmes (RFPs), and the concept of local forest programme has also been proposed (Nuutinen et al., 2008).

In Finland, one essential and innovative milestone of this process was the renewal of the Forest Act in 1996. Then, the forest programmes obtained in the form of the regional programme, perhaps for the first time in Europe, a firm legislative basis. Thereafter, noticeable number of studies have analysed aspects of the RFP processes focusing particularly on the preparation process and participation therein, (e.g., Hyttinen and Niskanen 1999; Hytönen 2000; Tikkanen 2003 and 2006; Tikkanen et al. 2003; Leskinen 2004; Leskinen et al. 2004; Hiedanpää 2004, 2005; Primmer and Kyllönen 2006; Saarikoski et al. 2010; Saarikoski et al. 2012). Thus, for now we have a rather good basis for presenting arguments to answer whether a participative turn has indeed happened behind the new rhetoric.

The aim of this study is to draw a synthesis of the forest programme process' evolution in Finland, which spans over 20 years, by focusing on empirical findings from the RFP process. The materials of the study include secondary data to conduct a summary of the evolution of RFP on the first 20 years, as well as interviews as primary data on the present situation.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What have been the dominant features of participation discourse and practices surrounding the RFP in Finland during its 20-year span?
2. Has participatory oriented research been capable to establish prominent and sustained participatory developments for the RFP process?
3. What type of participation-oriented research could catalyse prominent and sustained participatory changes in forest programmes?

## 2. Materials and methods

The analysis is focused on three conceptual levels. (1) Descriptive direct findings on the participation arrangements and institutional framework are given in five chronological phases of the programme; this is a praxis story on the post-Rio regional forest programmes in Finland, presented in the results section. (2) These findings are then synthesised in the first part of discussion section by featuring three discourses that have dominated the RFP discourse throughout the years. (3) Finally, the results reported here are used to evaluate the potentials of researchers to influence, by scientifically sound methodological proposals, how a programme-based policy process is practically orchestrated. In this section, studies on the RFP process are analysed by the planning theoretical perspectives.

The first analysis level (section four) findings are based on three different datasets (Table 1): (1) on the official policy outcomes including relevant acts and decrees complemented with underlying political argumentation in governmental proposals that led to the establishment and, later, the evolution of RFP-related institutions in Finland. Additionally governmental reports, strategies and programme reports belong to this first dataset. (2) The second dataset includes scientific and working papers that contemplate RFP from a participation view in Finland. Data of those studies have primarily been collected from the initial rounds of the RFP. Therefore, analysis on the latest turns in RFP discourse is based on the (3) interviews of the key stakeholders of forest programme processes.

The third dataset consists of 11 thematic interviews of key stakeholders. The ten interviews comprised 12 questions. In the very first questions, those interviewed described their professional background and were asked to name participatory forest policy processes they know in the local, regional, national and European level, and which ones they have been involved in. Then, they were asked to describe their input in those processes using the following questions as

a catalyst: How do you describe your participation? Are you mainly bringing your personal capacity for the process or representing your institution? Which one of the participation 'ladders' (Arnstein, 1969) best described your participation? Was your participation information sharing, consultation, advocacy or decision-making? Then, the interviewees were asked to list other organisations involved and evaluate processes verbally and numerically. Finally, they were encouraged to discuss any other matters they saw relevant for the interview.

Interviews were conducted in 2015. Each interview lasted from 32 min to 1 h and 23 min. The originally interviewed 10 experts were selected from among forestry professionals and representatives of stakeholder groups. A term stakeholder refers in general to 'a person with an interest or concern in something' (Oxford living dictionaries, 2017), in this paper in the RFPs.

Interviewed forestry professionals were responsible for the programme process at the national and regional levels (2 persons). Interviewed stakeholders (6) were members of forest councils at the national and regional levels, and thus had experience in RFP-preparation and participation therein. They represented forest owners, youth education, environmental administration (2), forest industry, and non-governmental environmental organisations. In addition, two researchers were interviewed; they have had a central role in producing information about the forest programme processes throughout the years. The last RFP process was ongoing when ten interviews were conducted. To get in touch with this ongoing process, one extra forest professional was interviewed, focusing on the practical participation arrangements of the last RFP process.

Interviews were transcribed and saved into the NVIVO software for the data driven analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). The transcribed interviews were first read through in their entirety. Thereafter, relevant sections were coded according to messages referring to participation. Messages that had the same connotations were merged gradually, and three main themes dominating the RFP participation discourse were identified and explained (Fig. 1). Finally, a consideration of the potential of the research to orchestrate RFP participation is based on a theoretical conceptualisation of participation research according to approaches used in the science on planning theory. The theoretical formulation for this is presented in the following section.

## 3. Theoretical orientation: planning theories<sup>1</sup>

Discussions on the theoretical premises of natural resources planning have been diverse for decades (e.g., Hahtola, 1990; Kessler, 1992; Leskinen, 1994; Galindo-Leal and Bunnell, 1995; Haila, 1996; Lehtonen, 1999; Mäntysalo, 2000; Lane, 2001; Ploger, 2001; McGuirk, 2001; Sager, 1994, 2001, 2009; Archibugi, 2004; Dandekar 2005; Richardson 2005; Isaksson et al. 2009; Runhaar et al., 2009; Blicharska et al., 2011; Saarikoski et al., 2013; Marom, 2014; Pelzer et al., 2015). However, forest programme-related studies have included only limited explanations of their theoretical starting-points. The selection of theories by the authors appears to be guided by personal preferences or interests, socialisation, tradition and researchers' previous knowledge (Jong et al., 2012) and might be more or less consistent (Sotirov and Memmler, 2012). Thus, the importance of theoretically sound policy studies for forest policy science has been called for (Kleinschmit et al., 2009; Giessen et al., 2009). Notably, work towards theoretically robust forest policy science is emerging (e.g., Jong et al., 2012; Arts, 2012; Weber, 2012).

Research on the methodological development of planning and policy analysis has mainly been normative and prescriptive by nature (French, 1989). Then, the study is oriented towards the specific underlying assumptions that define how the planning task should be conducted. There are numerous competing candidates for the norma-

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this section was published in Tikkanen, (2006, in Finnish).

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