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Participation or involvement? Development of forest strategies on national and sub-national level in Germany

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ABSTRACT

Forest strategies play an important role in policy-making on national and sub-national level. Based on scientific approaches of strategy development and participatory decision making (e.g. Buchy and Hoverman, 2000; Gane, 2007; Saarikoski et al., 2010), the article explains the connections between National Forest Programmes (NFP), forest strategies and related fora for dialogue. Moreover, participatory approaches in a multi-level governance context (e.g. Bernstein and Cashore, 2012; Lindstad and Solberg, 2012) are discussed at the example of Germany.

The Forest Strategy 2020 (*Waldstrategie 2020*) was adopted on national level by the German parliament in 2011. The strategy was considered as an alternative to the NFP process to provide solutions for problems and conflicts arising by a magnitude of societal interests. On sub-national level, several *Länder* have revised their forest policies accordingly by developing sub-national NFPs as well as conventional strategies. Both on national and on sub-national level, supporting fora (forest summits, fora for dialogue etc.) provided input to strategy development.

Participation by representation predominates, deliberation takes place only in a small number of cases. Moreover, there seems to be a development from information to public deliberation and later on to the involvement of a small number of interest groups as a kind of consultative participation.

1. Introduction

In many countries of Europe, there is a long tradition of forest policy programmes and strategies. These documents outline political goals and objectives for the forest sector for a certain period of time, many of them also describe ways and instruments how to achieve them. In recent decades, programmes and strategies are strongly influenced by international, pan-European and European Union negotiations and the respective provisions in conventions, resolutions, regulations, directives etc. (cf. European Union, 2003; Bernstein and Cashore, 2012; Lindstad and Solberg, 2012). As a consequence of the UNCED in Rio 1992, many National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been drafted. In addition, on the pan-European level, the idea of sustainable forest management should be reflected in any kind of planning about forests. Helsinki Resolution H 1 of 1993 states that “Forest management should be based on periodically updated plans or programmes at local, regional or national levels, as well as for ownership units, when appropriate and on forest surveys, assessments of ecological impact and on scientific knowledge and practical experience” (Helsinki Resolution H 1, General Guidelines, Nr. 4). In a similar vein, the Forest Action Plan (FAP) of the European Union pushes member states to develop plans at different scales. The FAP also emphasizes that sustainable forest management

can be fostered by participatory and multi-level approaches. All of these provisions and recommendations are based on the assumption that participatory approaches are improving the quality of planning and the legitimacy of decisions, although this is not necessarily the case (cf. Rantala, 2012, see paragraph 2.5). On European Union level, national and sub-national forest programmes have been regarded even as a precondition to receive subsidies for forestry from the structural funds of the European Union according to Reg. EC 1257/1999 (cf. Cullotta and Maetzke, 2009: 476).

Against this background, the following research questions guided the analysis:

1. Which types of political strategies and programmes for forests have been developed on national and sub-national level in Germany in the last 20 years?
2. What are the linkages between them with regard to contents and processes?
3. In what way participatory approaches have been applied in developing these strategies and programmes?
4. How are strategies and programmes on national level linked to the international context and a European multi-level governance perspective?

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In this article, at first a methodological framework is explained for political strategies and programmes in the forest sector, as well as for the concepts of participation, involvement and engagement. Second, a typology of strategies and programmes for the forest sector that have been adopted in Germany after UNCED in Rio 1992 is following. Third, selected strategies and programmes for forest and forestry in Germany are presented, including preparatory meetings. The latter are, for the purpose of this analysis, classified as supporting fora. Fourth, the results of the analysis are discussed against the methodological background and conclusions are drawn.

2. Methodology and definitions

2.1. Materials and methods

After an introductory analysis of documents on strategies and programmes on forestry, it became clear that, with the exception of National Forest Programmes (NFP), this issue has not received a lot of research interest up to now. This insight was confirmed by systematic searches in the Web of Science and Scopus. Queries in the categories “topic” and “title” did not disclose any entries for the combination of “forest strategy”, “forest policy strategy”, “forest programme”, “policy strategy”, “political strategy” with “Germany”. Even in an international focus, besides the national forest strategy of Canada, no systematic analysis of national forest strategies could be found.

For that reason, this article follows an explorative research approach. It is mainly based on official documents of the German Parliament (BT), the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), and the Saxon Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (SMUL). In addition, position papers of forest policy stakeholders have been analyzed. Although a lot of activities of forest strategy building on sub-national level have occurred in Germany, in this article these are only touched in their relationship to the national situation.

2.2. Forest policies, strategies and programmes.

It is a conceptual challenge to find clear delineations between policies, strategies, programmes and plans for the forest sector (cf. Gane, 2007; FAO, 2010). “The terms “policy” and “strategy” are frequently used interchangeably. Thus, some countries specify their forest policy in a “forest strategy” (FAO, 2010: 11). Similarly, strategy documents and national forest programme documents are often comparable. Sometimes forest legislation is the only form of forest policy (ibid.: 9). Another even more ambiguous term is “forest policy strategies.” However, according to Gane (2007: 310), “[f]or the sake of clarity, it is preferable to separate policy from strategy and retain the term ‘forest policy’ for public declarations of the government’s intentions for developing the forest sector.” In other words, a strategy is a “concept which bridges the gap between aims and their achievement” (Gane, 2007: xix). In a similar vein, FAO (2010: 11) states that “[a] national forest strategy or programme usually specifies a course of action to achieve the goals and objectives set in the policy.” FAO also propose that “a strategy usually provides direction on the approach to achieve the goals and objectives set by a policy. A programme is considered more of a long-term master plan to implement the policy or strategy. “Action plans” or “work plans” are usually more specific or short term” (FAO, 2010: 11).

Gane (2007: 291) regards *Forest policy* as a public policy that is applied to the forest sector. Hence, as public policy seems to be an equivalent to a strategy for government organizations, he proposes that “forest policy should correspond with forest sector strategy”. Moreover, “[a]t the sector level, forest policy and forest strategy should amount to the same thing. In practice, forest policy and forest strategy are not equivalent” (ibid.: 291; see also FAO, 2010: 5). “A forest policy is a declaration announcing the strategy to be followed for developing the forest sector. It should say what the strategy is expected to achieve and

the parts to be played by the principal organizations concerned with the development. (...) This definition makes it clear that strategy is prescriptive while policy has an explanatory function; forest policy depends on and supports forest strategy” (Gane, 2007: 295). *Forest strategy* “is defined as the cyclical process by which forest sector development is guided and promoted. In relation to each particular country or region covered by the strategy, it should provide a grand design, a basis for decision making and a sense of direction for the sector.” According to Gane, “[t]he function of the strategy process is to establish the constraints and specific development objectives that are relevant to the situation and outline the means by which those objectives are to be pursued, within a flexible format” (Gane, 2007: 297).

In contrast to forest strategies, the conception of *National Forest Programmes (NFP)* has been dealt with intensively by research (e.g. COST Action E 19). It is used in a more concise way in practical implementation. This seems to be the result of permanent adaptations of the concept since it was discussed intensively at the UNCED 1992. “NFPs are a comprehensive framework for a country’s forest policy. NFP processes and platforms are used to develop or revise forest policy, strategies and programmes and facilitate their implementation” (FAO, 2010: 10). However, FAO also states that National Forest Programmes (NFP) platforms or processes comprise all of the previously explained elements (ibid.: 11).

2.3. Multi-level governance

Many nation states in Europe are characterized by different forms of shared competences for forest policy between the national/federal level and the sub-national units (see e.g. Montiel and Galiana (2005) for Spain, Cullotta and Maetzel (2009) for Italy, Kangas et al. (2010) for Finland). That is why forest policy making in a multi-level context occurs in a conflict area between international, transnational and sub-national demands. Bernstein and Cashore (2012) have analyzed international influences on decision-making of nation states. They identified (i) international laws, (ii) international norms, (iii) markets and (iv) direct access as four decisive pathways. From that point of view, national strategies and programmes on forests are strongly influenced by international laws, especially on biodiversity and climate change. In a similar vein, international norms like sustainable forest management, and also participation, are mirrored in national decision making on forests and forestry.

2.4. Participation, involvement, engagement

Public participation is both a political catchword and “a fundamental prerequisite for successful strategies in view of legitimacy, mobilization, engagement, gathering of skills, information and knowledge, capacity building and effective implementation and as a value in its own right” (Tils, 2007: 169, based on UN, 2002, pp. 19–20). In natural resource management, mainly two reasons for the trend towards participatory approaches are obvious. First, there are theoretical considerations how to enhance democratic governance. Second, practical considerations point to the possibility to break policy impasses and build legitimacy as well as ownership. It is expected that participation contributes to well-informed and justified decisions. Moreover, these processes can help to develop social and institutional capital (Saarikoski et al., 2010: 350, summarizing previous conceptions).

There are many dimensions of participation with regard to participants, level of involvement, intensity, timing, or goals (Reed, 2008; Maier et al., 2014: 169 based on Dietz and Stern, 2008). Participation can be realized in two general ways. The first way is participation through *representation*. In this traditional form, citizens elect representatives who act in the interests of groups or parties. These have the authority to act more or less on their own initiative. The second way is

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