



Linking practices of multifunctional forestry to policy objectives: Case studies in Finland and the UK



Lee-Ann Sutherland^{a,*}, Suvi Huttunen^b

^a Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences Group, James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen AB15 8QH, UK

^b Finnish Environment Institute, Helsinki, Finland

A B S T R A C T

In this paper we address the disconnection between multifunctional woodland management and current forestry policies in Europe, using a practice theory approach. Drawing on cases in the UK and Finland, we identified seven bundles forestry practices: creating an attractive place to live, pursuing forest-based leisure practices, wildlife and biodiversity preservation, heritage conservation, renewable heat production, animal husbandry and timber production. By assessing the place of these forest-based practices within larger practice ‘complexes’ (such as farming, urban employment, family recreation), we demonstrate disconnections to current incentive programmes, which are largely oriented towards professional farmers or foresters. We found that study participants were largely unopposed to achieving national policy objectives (afforestation in the UK and commercial timber production in Finland); instead, their limited active engagement reflected available competencies and the lack of resources (particularly time) available to non-commercial forest managers. We argue that using practice theory helps to identify new opportunities to influence existing practices, such as increasing competences in harvesting of continuous growth forestry in Finland and encouraging small-scale renewable heat production in the UK.

1. Introduction

Forestry has been identified as a key element of the Europe 2020 Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the Resource Efficiency Roadmap, Rural Development Policy, the EU Climate and Energy Package, the Plant Health and Reproductive Materials Strategy and the Biodiversity and Bioeconomy Strategies (European Commission, 2013). The EU Forest Strategy specifically identifies the multiple functions, or ‘ecosystem services’ provided by forests, ranging from timber and renewable energy production, biodiversity preservation, to recreation and rural employment (European Commission, 2013). The major role of forests in carbon capture is also important to the EU commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by the year 2030 (European Commission, 2016). Many of these functions thus also represent public goods: the challenge for policy analysis and design is to align the incentives of forest landowners with societal objectives (Amacher et al., 2014).

Recent literature has demonstrated the disconnection between current forestry policies and the practices of forest owners. Some 60% of European forests and woodland is privately owned (Eurostat, 2015: 143). Hogl et al. (2005) point out that traditionally much of the privately owned forest in Europe was owned by farmers. The strong

cultural preference for agricultural production is a well-established barrier to afforestation on farms (Watkins et al., 1996; McDonagh et al., 2010; Wynne-Jones, 2013; Duesberg et al., 2013, 2014; Schirmer and Bull, 2014; Howley et al., 2015). Multifunctional transitions in the countryside (Cubbage et al., 2007; Urquhart et al., 2012) have also led to new cohorts of forest owners who manage for personal amenity and lifestyle, rather than for economic reasons (Karppinen, 1998; Mather, 2011; Hogl et al., 2005). The literature on multifunctional forestry highlights the challenges associated with increasing active forest management to achieve policy objectives (e.g. timber production): owners who manage their forests for personal amenity are less responsive to financial incentives (Urquhart and Courtney, 2011; Urquhart et al., 2009; Häyrinen et al., 2015; Favada et al., 2009) and frequently represent ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’ forest managers (Kvarda, 2004; Hogl et al., 2005; Favada et al., 2009).

Within Europe, the amount of forested land ranges from 11% in the Netherlands and Ireland to 73% in Finland (FAO, 2010). Empirically, our paper focuses on Finland and the UK (12% forest cover, FAO, 2010). Finland is an example of a ‘forest-rich developed country’ which recognizes both the economic and environmental value of forests and which has the means to support and practice sustainable development; the UK is an example of a ‘forest-poor developed country’, which relies

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Lee-Ann.Sutherland@hutton.ac.uk (L.-A. Sutherland), Suvi.Huttunen@ymparisto.fi (S. Huttunen).

on forest-rich countries to supply forest products, and highly values the environmental aspects of forests (Maini, 2003). The differing distributions of Europe's forests and the related differences in the role of forestry sectors in the national economies pose different problems for national governance. Forests form the backbone of the Finnish bioeconomy, with commercialisation identified as a means of achieving a more sustainable society and economic growth (Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy, 2014). Policies are oriented towards encouraging (sustainable) commercial management of forests, in order to boost the rural and national economies and to simultaneously achieve goals related to the provision of ecosystem services, biodiversity and climate change (MAF, 2015). In the UK, forest industries play a minor role in the national economy. Policies are more strongly oriented towards increasing afforestation, and to a lesser degree (than Finland) commercial management. However, UK forestry policies similarly aim to better address climate change, deliver ecosystem services, support rural development, and enable recreation and tourism (e.g. Defra, 2013; Forestry Commission Scotland, 2009).

The paper focuses on the management decisions of private land owners, particularly those undertaking alternative practices to commercial timber production. These are highly important for the realisation of policy goals in both study countries. The state Forestry Commission is the UK's largest land manager, responsible for some 900,000 ha of UK forests (nearly one third of the UK total), emphasising both timber and public recreation (Forestry Commission, 2016). The remaining forest is privately held by individuals, family trusts, charitable trusts or companies, yielding about 40,000 woodland owners (i.e. less than 1% of the population, Woodland Trust, 2011). Owing to low levels of forestry, individual scattered trees, small groups and belts of trees are identified as important for ecosystem service provision, and are included in national assessments (Woodland Trust, 2011). In Finland, the state owns a similar share of forests to the UK (35%) (FFRI, 2014). However, a considerable share of the state forests are conservation areas or situated in the Northern part of the country with slow regeneration rates, making privately owned forests the main source of timber. Private forest owners are predominantly non-industrial private persons and their forest holdings are relatively small, making the ownership very scattered: there are almost 700,000 individual forest owners in Finland (13% of the population, FFRI, 2014).

In both Finland and the UK, current policies are not meeting their target objectives. In Finland, recent harvesting volumes are well below the sustainable felling capacity (FFRI, 2014). The bioeconomy and forest strategies emphasise increased timber production, and wood-based products and services (Finnish Bioeconomy Strategy, 2014; MAF, 2015). While forest owners in general are more favourable towards timber production and related forest management compared to the general public (Valkeapää and Karppinen, 2013), studies have demonstrated increasing numbers of recreational and indifferent forest owners, who are less likely to harvest their forests (Favada et al., 2009; Leppänen, 2010). This trend is expected to continue, owing to decreasing numbers of farmers, increasing shares of urban forest owners and increasing numbers of small forest holdings (Häyriäinen et al., 2015). In the UK, woodland expansion is emphasised, particularly on farms and other private lands (see Forestry Commission, 2015: Section 8.6). Despite substantial recent incentives (totalling over £0.5 billion in grants from 2005–6 to 2014–15 within England, Scotland and Wales, Forestry Commission, 2015: Section 8.6), recent new planting rates are insufficient to meet targets of 10,000 ha per year (compare Forestry Commission, 2015: Table 1.14 to Scottish Government, 2013a, DEFRA, 2013, Osmond and Upton, 2012 and Forest Service, 2014/2015).

The difficulties faced by current forestry policies in Europe have alternatively been assessed from the perspective of the attitudes and motivations of private forest owners, or institutional structures influencing the forest sector. Attitudinal studies assume that motivations and resource access are the primary influences on behaviour change (i.e. methodological individualism - that humans are rational actors,

responding to their own personal motivations) (e.g. Howley et al., 2015; Eves et al., 2014; Favada et al., 2009). This approach largely excludes the role of habits and interactions (between individuals, groups, material objects and the natural environment) which shape behaviour on an on-going basis, as well as the relationships between forestry and other land management or household practices. The institutional approach seeks to assess the diverse functions provided by forest ecosystems by focusing on the institutional norms and rules that shape the behaviour of different actors (e.g. Vatn, 2010; Primmer, 2011; Primmer et al., 2013; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2017). While the institutional approach identifies the influence of structural forces influencing behaviour, it pays less attention to the ways the rules and norms are applied and reformed 'on the ground'.

In this paper we utilise a practice theory approach to achieve a more nuanced perspective on the processes of afforestation and forest management and their relationship to forest policies, in order to inform policy design to better achieve policy goals. Practice theory focuses on the social and collective organisation of practices: practices – not people or their property – are the core unit of analysis (Schatzki et al., 2001; Reckwitz, 2002). Individuals are constructed as carrying out practices; individuals' values, knowledge and capabilities are conceptualised as elements of practices, rather than personal attributes (Reckwitz, 2002). Using a practice theory perspective offers the opportunity to identify 'footholds' for behaviour change, which go beyond removing contextual barriers and instead offer suggestions for how changes can usefully be integrated into larger, interconnected sets of practices that endure long-term (Shove and Watson, 2010). Practice theory also represents an advance on institutional approaches to governance by taking into account the ways rules set by institutions are reshaped and even rejected in the interconnected practices (e.g. de Koning, 2014).

In this paper, we identify and assess multifunctional forestry practices, focusing on private land owners in the two study countries. We particularly emphasise the link between policy targets of afforestation (UK) and timber production (Finland), and provision of other ecosystem services, such as recreation. Our specific research questions are:

- What practices involve forests in the two study sites and what kind of forest management do they imply?
- How are the identified forest management practices influencing the potential for timber production and afforestation?
- What can we learn from the interdependencies of the practices involving forest use to better achieve diverse policy goals?

2. Theory

Practice-based approaches have recently emerged in various fields of social sciences including consumption studies (Warde, 2005; Shove et al., 2012), organisational studies (Erden et al., 2014) and geography (Jones and Murphy, 2011), reflecting the 'practice turn' in social theory (Schatzki et al., 2001). This shift is connected to the material and post-human turn, including material objects in social ontologies (Schatzki, 2010) and the call for more complex understanding of the messy interplay of things and ideas or body and mind (Singleton, 2012). Related to forest governance, practice theory is seen as providing a way to overcome the pitfalls of the commonly utilised rational choice and neo-institutional approaches by combining actors and structures, adhering to the complexity of social life and factoring in the materiality and non-human actors (Arts et al., 2014).

The core of practice approaches can be traced to Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) observation that people do not act rationally (following incentives provided by policies or based on social norms and rules). Instead, a large part of their actions follow the logic of practice: the daily flow of activities including both improvisation and routines without conscious consideration of the reasons behind the action. Hence, in order to understand and influence human behaviour, we should focus on the production and reproduction of (everyday)

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