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## Translating institutional change - forest journals as diverse policy actors

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## ABSTRACT

Forest governance is in a state of change as the competition between different forest uses increases and as new interests such as those motivated by biodiversity conservations or carbon sequestration enter the policy scene. These changes are reflected in the renewed Finnish Forest Act from 2014, which is based on an underlying assumption that increasing freedom in the management will support the objectives of the renewal such as the promotion of more active and innovative uses of forests. But a change in law does not change practice automatically or linearly. We study the role of intermediary actors facilitating the objectives by focusing on specialized forest journals. Informed by the Narrative Policy Framework and the role of media therein, we show how these actors contribute to institutional change. We suggest that their roles can be understood by analyzing five key functions: informing, activating, interest promotion, self-promotion and marketing. We argue that these functions affect how a policy change is turned into practice. In this change specialized journals are not just intermediaries transmitting messages of change. They can also act as street level bureaucrats that actively influence practice or as lobbies that anxiously aim to maintain their positions. A careful analysis of the roles helps to understand why specialized journals that should be in forefront of progress in practice often promote incremental change rather than innovative alternatives.

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## 1. Introduction

Competition between different uses of forests is increasing. Besides the traditional forest policy stakeholders that focus on timber production, other interest groups and agendas such as those related to the environment, bioenergy or more immaterial ecosystem services are gaining weight in forest policy design (Agrawal et al., 2008; Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Thus the socio-ecological domain of forestry is increasingly influenced by multiple actors and objectives (Armitage et al., 2007; Sternlieb et al., 2013). The same development has been observed in different forestry dependent countries and from the global to local levels (Agrawal et al., 2008; Arts and Buizer, 2008; Rametsteiner, 2009).

As a consequence of the diversification of policy objectives, various meso-level actors, i.e. identifiable groups with specific tasks and practices, but not necessarily linked to governmental structures and with no formal role, play an increasing role in how the policy aims are to be reached, how the policy is translated and understood among forest actors, and how forestry practices develop. Intermediary actors such as media, interest-groups and lobbies have been identified to be especially significant within changing governance structures. (Hajer, 2009; Meyer and Kearnes, 2013) These actors translate the changes alongside formal implementation mechanisms and affect both the emergence and

implementation of policies (Davis et al., 2015; Moss, 2009). An analysis of these mechanisms is of practical and theoretical interest as they may influence the final outcome of policy changes. In this forest policy is no exception. For example, meso-level actors have been noted to be important in the implementation of the REDD+ objectives (Atela et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016).

In Finland, the forest sector has traditionally played a major role in the national economy and the central objective of forest policy has been to provide a steady flow of timber to the industry. The balance between the over 630,000 private forest owners and a market dominated by very large, nowadays international, forest companies has supported a regulated and organized policy structure dating back to the 19th century, with a relatively narrow scale of allowed forest management practices tied to even-age structured forests (Finnish Forest Research Institute, 2013; Hiedanpää et al., 2011; Kotilainen and Rytteri, 2011). Neo-corporatist institutional structures have consolidated the regulatory arrangement committing forest industries, forest owners and the governmental organizations to shared objectives that have benefitted all involved actors (Ollonqvist, 2002; Siiskonen, 2007). In recent years this structure has eroded due to several interconnected developments including the diversification of forest ownership and new agendas such as biodiversity protection, use of bioenergy and mitigation of climate change. They challenge the traditional forest management which has focused mainly on timber. Simultaneously the share of the forest industry has decreased in the national economy, which has partly reduced the industry's policy influence (Huttunen, 2014; Hänninen et al., 2011; Kotilainen and Rytteri, 2011).

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One manifestation of the changing policy conditions was the 2014 revision of the Finnish Forest Act (1093/1996). In particular, it removed some of the established restrictions on forest management and allowed methods such as continuous cover forestry. The underlying assumption was that more freedom for diverse actors would lead to more active and innovative uses of forests. Along with the Forest Act also the position and regulation of the advisory and monitoring organizations have undergone change. Especially the changes in the Forest Management Association Act (534/1998) that made the previously mandatory membership of forest owners voluntary, created new opportunities for market based forestry services directed to forest owners. This also changed the dynamics of the traditional policy actors that could no longer rely on stable relationships. The developments have created a new operating environment, where more diverse policy actors are allowed and needed to communicate, operationalize and interpret forest policy. As this field is opened and diversified, existing actors can influence the change by accelerating it, steering it in a particular direction or resisting it by clinging to established paths (Medd and Marvin, 2008). The ways in which this occurs offers indications on how the actors adopt new roles made possible by the regulatory change.

It is common practice to analyze the role of different actors to understand policy change. Here we focus a particular type of meso-level policy actor, the forest media. The media is a recognized policy actor (Shanahan et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2014), but we ask if the media could play multiple roles in a forest policy transformation. The starting point is that specialized forest journals are considered the most important source of forest information among private forest owners in Finland (Hänninen et al., 2011). All of these journals are affiliated with either governmental or interest-group forest organizations or the forest industry. Hence the journals are likely to be active policy actors, but what roles do they play? The mediating of information and connections between the different forest actors and advancing the interests of their background organizations are obvious roles, but given their central role in the forestry sector they can potentially do more and contribute to the actual implementation of the forest policy at the forest owner interface. In order to provide new insights into the journals' role as policy actors we focus on the renewal of the Forest Act and explore: 1. What functions the journals perform as policy actors when translating forest policy; 2. How these functions relate to the journals' roles as policy actors; and 3. How the functions and roles influence the ongoing institutional changes in Finnish forest policy.

The paper is organized as follows. First we examine the role of media during policy change and present the concepts of intermediaries, street-level bureaucrats and lobbies in order to analyze forest journals as policy actors. We continue with an overview of the studied journals with their background organizations and an empirical analysis of the functions they carry out in translating and interpreting forest policy. We then scrutinize the connections between the functions and the policy aims of the organizations and consider the roles the journals play in forest policy. Finally we discuss how the journals can influence the institutional change, and argue that in order to obtain the policy aims, it is important to recognize the path dependency stemming from the traditional positions of the forest policy actors, which affects the ways the journals use their power as policy actors.

## 2. Media as policy actors

Following the role of media in the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), we understand the ways media operates in policy change processes as part of the sphere, where competing policy narratives and strategies are constructed (Jones et al., 2014). Besides affecting the design of policies, these strategies effect how policy change is perceived and thus on the ways policy objectives are to be reached (Shanahan et al., 2008). We follow the premises of the NPF, but instead of scrutinizing a certain policy narrative and its elements, we focus on the different roles and strategies of the media in the forest policy sphere. This helps

in using NPF to structure and understand how the media, especially specialized media, participates in the formation of policy narratives and practice.

In policy change literature, media has been conceptualized to function either as a provider of a platform for policy actors and reflecting the variety of policy arguments (e.g. Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), or in more recent debates, as an active contributor to policy processes (Shanahan et al., 2008; Shanahan et al., 2011). However, depending on the context, media can also simultaneously have characteristics of both (Park, 2013). This can be reflected in the issues covered, but the characteristics of the media, such as the differences between local and national newspapers also matter (Di Gregorio et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2008).

Our focus is on specialized media that mediate forest related issues such as changes in policy to their main target audience, forest owners. In this they also shape, interpret and transform the forest policy objectives. Regardless of how deliberate this is, the journals play a role in the design and formation of policies and in the ways they are translated and interpreted at the level of practice (Di Gregorio et al., 2013). The way in which media presents new ideas has a significant effect on how they are received (Brewer and Gross, 2010). These processes can thus either promote but also hinder this diffusion of novelty (Waldherr, 2012).

One way to understand the role of media is to conceptualize the journals as *intermediaries*, i.e. organizations, networks and mechanisms translating, decontextualizing and creating knowledge and skills between different actors and contexts (Frandsen and Johansen, 2015; Howells, 2006; Moss et al., 2009). In the policy context, intermediaries facilitate the creation of new policies and can have an active role in promoting, translating and restructuring policy aims, objectives and novel practices (Davis et al., 2015; Klerix and Leeuwis, 2009; Medd and Marvin, 2008). Studies concerning media and intermediaries often portray media merely as a platform for intermediary actors and work (Edwards, 1999; Smith Maguire and Matthews, 2010). This reflects a tendency to emphasize the presumed altruistic nature of intermediaries (Davis et al., 2015). However, Moss et al. (2009) stress the need to differentiate between actors merely mediating or facilitating, and intermediaries, who often also have their own agendas in the processes. Here we understand the intermediary role of media in the latter sense.

The specialized media can become more directly involved in the policy implementation mechanisms and institutions than intermediaries by providing specific interpretations, guidance and advice to their readers. Actors implementing macro level policy objectives at the micro level have often been referred to as *street-level bureaucrats*, who, while implementing a policy, simultaneously also adjust and alter it in their practices (Lipsky, 1980). Street-level bureaucrats are mostly perceived as actors operating face-to-face with citizens directly affiliated with formal policy organizations (Brodkin, 2011a), but the concept offers leverage to analyze other policy actors involved in policy implementation. Analyses of street-level bureaucracies have stressed that these actors operate in the spaces between policy and its outcomes (Brodkin, 2011b). In these spaces they have to cope with the expectations, objectives and instruments assigned to them and in their semi-independent position come up with applicable solutions based on their experiences and insights (Hupe and Buffat, 2014). The specialized journals we examine typically operate in a space in which they have to cope with aims and expectations from their background organizations and knowledge brokerage supporting policy implementation in the way they see best to suit their readers, not necessarily fully reflecting the interests of their background organizations. In this way they can be usefully analyzed as street level bureaucrats.

In addition to mediate and translate policy objectives as intermediaries, and contribute to policy implementation as street-level bureaucrats, media can also operate as a more direct *lobby*. Lobbies are often defined as interest-groups or institutions of various structures - be they NGOs, private or public organizations - that aim to provide insights,

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