



Exploring the interlinkages between governance and social capital: A dynamic model for forestry



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ABSTRACT

The concept of social capital within the forest governance field encompasses networks, norms and values of local communities that determine cooperation and contribute to their development. Interlinkages among community characteristics affecting the implementation of governance arrangements, forest policy instruments or traditional social norms are untangled; this enlightens policy-makers and practitioners about the variables requiring attention beyond traditional technical factors or individual incentives. Through the review of social capital (SC) and forest governance literature, we find network structure and institutions as their common core aspects. Theoretical relationships and feedbacks are first identified, and then checked in published forestry case studies.

We propose hence a dynamic, nested model comprehensively illustrating the co-evolution of SC and forest governance elements along a policy process. The model uncovers the interrelation between different factors underlying natural resources' and rural development challenges based on cooperative behaviour. This model identifies cognitive dimensions of SC as triggers of local-level governance reforms. Network structure shapes information flows, power relationships, trust among actors and innovation spread. Trust and social sanctioning impinge on the enforcement of (in)formal norms and rules. The model applies in forest policies entailing cooperation among open-access resource users, landowners' coordination for adjacency externalities, upscaling management, or value chain reorganisation.

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1. Introduction

Our paper aims at increasing the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the relationships between social capital and forest governance in rural areas, delving into their cause–effect interlinkages. We put special emphasis on those linkages conducive to better economic performance of rural communities, suggesting a process-based model for understanding their interactions as applied in the forestry sphere.

Societal dilemmas concerning access to or use of natural resources (NR) are shaped by diverse actors' interactions¹ (Bodin and Crona, 2009). Depending on the research perspective adopted, these interactions can be analysed in different ways. The two prominent ones are linked to political and socio-economic sciences as follows.

From the viewpoint of political scientists, interactions among government, market and civil society actors² in the pursuit of common goals are changing, determining a shift from hierarchical-based to

network-based governance modes (e.g. Kjaer, 2004; Rhodes, 1997). This approach is also consolidated in NR management (NRM); the way in which the public administration, market and civil society deal with environmental challenges determines the establishment of co-management initiatives, private-public partnerships or social-private agreements (e.g. Lemos and Agrawal, 2006). Networked governance sets the stage for the analysis of (partially) decentralised actors' coordination, representing a mode of governing where the public administration is “dependent upon the cooperation and joint resource mobilization of policy actors outside their hierarchical control” (Börzel, 1998:260). In the last decade, on the one hand, networked governance has become a salient approach in NR management, as several policy instruments have been applied based on local networks for the co-production of benefits, especially in rural communities (i.e. Nath et al., 2010; Ribot, 2002). On the other, different sets of “good governance” principles have been used as yardsticks to evaluate the integrity of governing processes, typically at national level. In relation to NR management, these include efficiency, participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, equity and capacity (e.g. Conley and Moote, 2003; Cashore, 2009a, 2009b; Rametsteiner, 2009; Kaufmann et al., 2010; Cowling et al., 2014; Secco et al., 2014).

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¹ “Interactions” is used interchangeably with the terms “connections”, “relations”, “flows” or “exchanges”.

² In this paper we use “actors” as (rural) community members, and hence as social agents.

From the point of view of socio-economic scientists, the same actors' interactions constitute an asset for each society, labelled as social capital (SC) in parallel with other forms of capital³ (financial, human, natural or built) (Castle, 2002; Scoones, 1998). Social capital has been defined as the features of social organisations that facilitate coordination and cooperation for the mutual benefit of both individual members and the society as a whole (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988; Bourdieu, 1986). These features include networks, reciprocity, norms and trust (Bowles and Gintis, 2002) which, if used in a positive manner, encourage collective action to achieve sustainable development (Pretty and Ward, 2001; Woolcock, 2001). At community level,⁴ the SC catalyses flows (e.g. information and collaboration exchange) among community members in building or consolidating institutions ("rules of the game" according to North, 1990) that shape collective action related to NR.

Different theoretical models use SC, interacting with other types of capital, as an explanatory factor for community economic and social performance.⁵ Generally, the analysis of SC as an enabling intangible factor for sustainable NR management has found positive connections between local-level network-based relationships and successful joint management practices (Bodin et al., 2006; Pretty and Smith, 2004). Some scholars hypothesised that a strong SC contributes to better community outcomes (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Nevertheless, local relations linked with strong SC⁶ are sometimes reported to block governance processes (e.g. Kamoto et al., 2013; Zuka, 2013) and the community development itself (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

It is thus clear that the two concepts (governance and SC) are strictly interconnected: network governance deals with societal challenges entailing institutional changes by increasing agents' coordination, collaboration and participation in multiple facets (multi-actor, multi-sector, and multi-level), which constitute core SC elements.

The relationships between SC and NRM governance have so far been explored only in relation to specific fields of analysis (e.g. community-based NR management, participatory processes), and their nature and intensity are not entirely clear. Our guiding idea is that community interactions are relevant for NRM governance in a broader sense: being neither restricted to the narrow property rights' system (community ownership), nor formally setting participation processes. Moreover, within a socio-ecological system framework, the linkages connecting SC and NRM governance go beyond the simplification of the former as an input to the latter, given the likely endogeneity – the "chicken-and-egg" dilemma (Plummer and FitzGibbon, 2007:43). In particular, Luthe et al. (2012) noted the need for further research on the role of networks in the mechanisms and practices of switching between governance modes.

There is a need for a throughout analysis of SC and governance relations in the forestry realm, where the causal link between SC and collective action is not fully understood (Borg et al., 2015; García-Amado et al., 2012), and which lack theoretical models of the relationship between forest-dependent communities and forest policy changes (Akamani and Hall, 2015). Taking a policy network analysis approach (Arts, 2012), we consider the bi-directional effects among networks and institutions, framing them within a policy cycle model. We thus adopt the definition of forest governance that encompasses these key elements: "a) all formal and informal, public and private regulatory structures, i.e. institutions consisting of rules, norms, principles, decision procedures, concerning forests, their utilisation and their conservation, b) the interactions between public and private actors therein, and c) the effects of either on forests" (Giessen and Buttoud, 2014:1).

³ The term "capital" is used in a stock-flow context insofar as the fluxes of interactions "are accumulated –invested- and hereby become a stock" (Paldam and Svendsen, 2000:345)

⁴ SC can be analysed at individual (micro-) or community (meso-) levels. For details, see Section 3.

⁵ Bourdieu's theory of practise (1986), Castle's model of rural capital (2002), or DFID livelihood asset pentagon (1999).

⁶ SC critics indeed pinpoint the potential inequalities strong networks may imply, such as perpetuation of power relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Ishihara and Pascual, 2009).

After the **Introduction** and **Methodology** (Sections 1 and 2), the paper presents a review of governance and SC concepts and dimensions from a general perspective (Section 3). This is followed by a theoretical analysis of the bridging elements between the two concepts, highlighting cause-effect relationships and illustrated – when available – by specific insights into the forestry realm (Section 4). Section 5 attempts to re-conceptualise SC and governance elements and their inter-linkages, proposing a model of their co-evolution along a policy reform process. We discuss the model and suggest its application in forestry, followed by the conclusions.

2. Methodology

This paper focuses on unfolding potential linkages between SC and forest governance, by taking a descriptive (positive) approach. We do not make inferences about governance assessment based on good governance principles (i.e. we do not take a normative approach). However, we provide some insights on possible connections between these principles and the SC-governance interactions as described in our model (see Section 5).

We took a deductive approach in this study. First, through a literature review, we explored the key dimensions of SC and governance concepts, and their compounding elements. The literature review was conducted in two steps. Six keywords were searched in SCOPUS appearing either in the title, abstract or keywords: "social capital", "governance", "natural resource", "forest*", "rural development" and "network". Three terms were combined simultaneously, following the criteria of being as targeted and comprehensive as possible.⁷ The search was done in March 2015 and produced 129 scientific papers. Although SCOPUS may not be an exhaustive database for scientific literature, we used it as it indexes most common journals on forest and NR policy and economics. The term "governance" being relatively new may hamper the detection of previous studies conducting similar analyses but using other wording; however, we chose it as "policy making" or "management" would have been less meaningful. Papers were filtered according to the coherence between keywords and content, as well as their focus on SC aspects of local-level forest governance, resulting in 60 papers. Papers were either fully theoretical (7), presenting an analytical model checked in forestry case studies (5) or purely empirical (48). An additional 52 papers regularly cited as basic literature on governance, SC and environment completed the list.

In particular, two core elements were identified as bridging the governance and SC divides (namely, "networks" and "institutions"), around which we explored the possible cause-effects relationships. These relationships were classified by adopting a result-chain approach (Virtanen and Uusikylä, 2004), inspired by the input-output policy model of Easton (1957). We consequently outlined a comprehensive new conceptual model putting together theoretical and empirical evidence reported in the literature, structured within a forest policy process.

3. Governance and social capital links: state of the art in forestry

How SC influences NR governance, forestry and rural development is a recent scientific field, as revealed by our SCOPUS search (Fig. 1 – additional material), with an increasing number of scientific publications. In this section, the first insights into the SC concept applied to the NR and forestry realm are reported (Section 3.1), followed by an overview of current knowledge on SC and forest governance (Section 3.2).

⁷ The combinations used were: Forest* AND "social capital" AND network; Forest* AND governance AND network; "Natural resources" AND governance AND "social capital"; Forest* AND governance AND "social capital"; "social capital" AND governance AND "rural development".

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