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Actor-centred power: The driving force in decentralised community based forest governance☆☆☆

Max Krott, Axel Bader, Carsten Schusser*, Rosan Devkota, Ahmad Maryudi, Lukas Giessen, Helene Aurenhammer

Chair of Forest and Nature Conservation Policy, Georg-August University Goettingen, Buesgenweg 3, D-37077 Goettingen, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Community forestry has been described as a decentralised mode of forest governance that only partly lives up to its expectations. The power of important actors to misuse the community forestry approach for their self-interests has been reported as a major obstacle to comprehensive success. Hence, this article aims at developing an analytical, theory-based and empirically applicable framework for assessing an actor's power using community forestry as an illustrative case. The actor-centred power approach (ACP) analysis aims to provide a scientific answer to the question of who are the politically most powerful actors in community forestry practices. In making use of suitable components of power theories it builds strongly upon the social relations of actors, organisational aspects and power sources, as described by Weber, Dahl, Etzioni and their adherents. Actor-centred power approach (ACP) is defined as a social relationship in which actor A alters the behaviour of actor B without recognising B's will. In our framework we distinguish between three core elements: coercion, (dis-)incentives and dominant information. These make up the basis for observable facts that involve not only physical actions but also threats by power elements and the very sources of said power elements. Theoretical considerations show that, despite the focus being on actors, by looking to their power sources a considerable part of structural power can be more tangible at least in part, like rules, discourse or ideologies. Furthermore, the paper shows how the actor-centred power approach distinguishes power from other influences on forest management and contributes to the identification of the group of powerful actors on an empirical basis. Due to the focus on actors and well-defined and observable elements of power, the actor-centred power approach (ACP) could serve not only as a basis for research but also as a tool for quick assessment of power networks, delivering valuable preliminary information for designing forest policy in practice.

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1. Forest governance, community forestry and actors' power

The ways in which forests are governed and related changes in forest governance at multiple levels have recently been intensively scrutinised (e.g. Glück et al., 2005; Agrawal et al., 2008; Hogl et al., 2008; Werland, 2009; Arts and Buizer, 2009; Rametsteiner, 2009; Arts, 2012; Giessen et al., 2009; Cashore and Stone, 2012; Pettenella and Brotto, 2012; Ojha et al., 2009; Howlett et al., 2009; Buttoud, 2012, Ed., Böcher et al., 2009). The concepts used for analysing forest governance within this research programme are either of a normative (e.g., Rametsteiner, 2009 on good governance) or an analytical nature (e.g., Giessen, 2009; 2010a,b on regional forest governance). In this

vein we understand forest governance to comprise all public and private regulatory structures concerning the utilisation and conservation of forests, as well as the interactions between public and private actors therein. Both types of approaches, normative as well as analytical ones, were shown to be useful in assessing different aspects of forest governance, its dynamics and (for normative ones) also its performance against normative criteria. In the analytical realm the following, broader empirical trends in forest governance have been described, which, as a whole, are in favour of voluntary, self-regulatory or market-based mechanisms (Glück et al., 2005; Hogl et al., 2008; Agrawal et al., 2008; Arts and Visseren-Hamakers, 2012):

- *Marketisation* through the promotion of market incentives, forest certification, and payment for environmental services
- *Decentralisation* including devolution, new roles for the state as meta-governor through incentives and evaluations, participation, community-based forest governance and community forestry, forest self-organisation and opening of traditional actor networks

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 551 39 33410, +49 170 6876123(mobile); fax: +49 551 39 33415.

E-mail address: cschuss@gwdg.de (C. Schusser).

- *Internationalisation* of forests as an issue, including international deliberations, national forest programmes and other vertical coordination efforts
- *Cross-sectoralisation* of policies, including cross-sector linkages and horizontal coordination with other sectors and their policies.

Within all these broad trends in forest governance the power of important political actors has been reported to be a decisive factor to help explain them comprehensively (Brockhaus et al., 2012; Agrawal et al., 2008; Giessen et al., 2009; Giessen, 2010a,b). Additionally, in the particular field of community forestry as a new and decentralised mode of forest governance, the power of actors has been identified as a crucial factor that calls for closer scrutiny (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2003; Shackleton et al., 2002; Pérez-Ciera and Lovett, 2006; Medina et al., 2009; Agrawal et al., 2008; Devkota, 2010; Maryudi, 2011; Schusser, 2012a,b; Yufanyi Movuh, 2012; Yufanyi Movuh and Schusser, 2012)

There is, however, a lack of theory-based, yet empirically applicable, well operationalised analytical frameworks in forest policy research for assessing actors' power as a driving force in community forestry (Devkota, 2010; Maryudi, 2011; Maryudi et al., 2012; Schusser, 2012a,b; Yufanyi Movuh, 2012; Yufanyi Movuh and Schusser, 2012). This lack of academic work is taken as the point of departure for this article. Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop an analytical, theory-based and empirically applicable framework for assessing actors' power, using community forestry as an illustrative case. The following section will develop this objective in more detail.

2. Actors' power: uncovering the hidden capabilities of political actors by means of forest governance research

The high aspiration of returning the forest to the hands of local people in order to implement sustainable management is often associated with the concept of community forestry, but it was achieved only in part (Wollenberg et al., 2008; Sikor and Nguyen, 2007). Apparently, and in accordance with the concept, local actors gained influence over their forests, but some of the local and even extra-local elites acquired dominant influence and proceeded to misuse the community forest for their own specific interests (Devkota, 2010; Maryudi et al., 2012). In the practical discourse, the questions of who causes failure and who has the potential to improve community forestry practices are discussed heatedly and with much controversy (e.g., National Conference on Forest–People Interaction 2010, Nepal, International Workshop Burbach, Germany 2011). Policy analysis could provide a scientifically sound knowledge base for answering these questions, especially by analysing the actors' power and its use as a driving force of community forestry.

Political research can help identify the capabilities specific actors may have for solving problems in community forestry politics. Specifically, an important part of this is making the power of said actors, which is often hidden, visible empirically. Awareness of the power relations helps to find the right actors who can support a specific solution politically. Therefore, one goal in achieving the aim of the paper is to design a concept for assessing the power of actors in any given land use issue. We have developed our concept by doing research on community forestry. Consequently, the study makes use of such research, but due to the general basis of our theoretical approach, the concept may be useful for analysing power within other land use issues. The concept is designed as an analytical, theory-based and empirically applicable framework for assessing actors' power using community forestry as an illustrative case. In more detail, the notion of actor-centred power should meet the following specific requirements:

- * Specifying the power process and its elements

To start with, we assume power as the capability of an actor to influence other actors. "Power" is a general term for an invisible

force, which makes it difficult to deal with in practical politics. If scientific analysis were to break down "power" into elements describing the specific processes that constitute it, one could better understand what power is and how it could be manipulated or amplified. For example, if power is based on physical sources, like weapons, it is easier to detect it and to find ways to deal with it.

- * Linking power to specific actors

The aim of describing the potential of a specific actor requires the power concept to identify results for specific actors. Identifying a power process would not be sufficient; it is also necessary to describe the part of the power that has a link to a given actor. Here, one would hope to ascertain how much power a given actor has, in comparison to other actors.

- * Differentiating between "power" and other capabilities that actors may have

An actor influences forestry problems in many ways. He can technically modify the forest by cutting or planting trees; he can improve decisions with new and better knowledge about the forest, e.g., about the ecological needs of trees; he can participate in discourse or he can sell or buy timber. Influencing forests by means of these diverse capabilities is linked to power but it does not make sense to sum up all capabilities into the resulting power. Rather, the capabilities of an actor merely provide the basis of power but would only *become* power if they are used purposely to change the behaviour of another actor. The challenge is to specify the power and to distinguish it from the general capabilities an actor might have.

- * Observing empirical incidences suggesting the presence of power

We do not expect power to be visible directly and often. Therefore, we need to make observations that may suggest the presence and magnitude of this otherwise invisible force. This concept should bridge well-defined power and empirical findings.

In designing a concept that meets these aims we will rely on existing political theory. First, we will explain how we make use of theory, then we will select suitable theoretical building blocks for our concept and finally, we will elaborate it. Examples from community forestry are used to illustrate theoretical arguments. Devkota (2010), Maryudi (2011), Schusser (2012a,b), Yufanyi Movuh (2012) and Yufanyi Movuh and Schusser (2012), have applied the actor-centred power approach in five case studies of community forestry in Nepal, Indonesia, Namibia, Germany and Cameroon already, but presenting these results in detail would exceed the intended length of this paper. Focused on our goal of describing the power of specific actors, we will speak of an "actor-centred power analysis".

3. The relevant power theories

3.1. Diverse and contested power theories

Dealing with power means looking at one of the old core topics in political science. In grounding our concept in these political theories we hope to make use of the analytical strength of numerous political thinkers and, additionally, to build on the vast empirical findings which were used in theory-based analysis of power processes worldwide (de Jong et al., 2012). Forest policy researchers have little doubt that power is a key factor in forest politics as well as in scientific analysis and in practice. But in certain research concepts and results, the power factor often disappears. For example, forest policy authors use the terms "influence" and "capacity" to address processes similar to power (Silva, 1997; Winkel and Sotirov, 2011). In contrast, Arts and van Tatenhove (2004) addresses power explicitly, and offers a comprehensive overview of power theories that gives us a good starting point. It becomes clear that the power debate is very diverse. The different power concepts generate different terms, overlap, and parts of them

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