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The process of forest management plans preparation in the Republic of Macedonia: Does it comprise governance principles of participation, transparency and accountability? ☆

M. Stojanovska ^{a,*}, M. Miovska ^{b,1}, J. Jovanovska ^{c,2}, V. Stojanovski ^{d,3}

^a UKIM, Faculty of Forestry, Skopje, Macedonia

^b University of Padua, Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry, Legnaro, PD, Italy

^c Forest Policy and Economics, FOPER II, University of Belgrade, Forest Faculty, Belgrade Serbia

^d BOKU University, Vienna, Austria

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ABSTRACT

Leaving the centralized and trying to embrace the market economy, the forestry sector of the country has been brought to a challenge of moving from government to the new trend of governance. The paper examines whether governance principles of participation, accountability and transparency are comprised in the process of preparation of forest management plans. By scrutinizing the prevailing governance theory through a relevant legislative content analyses and conducted in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, the paper provides findings about cooperative forest policy-making in the process of forest management plan preparation through self organizing networks of participants from policy and society. Results obtained from the Law on forests and other related secondary legislation show that only two entities are involved in the preparation process, whereas the Ministry of forestry, agriculture and water economy and the Public enterprise "Macedonian Forest". On the other hand, results obtained from the conducted in-depth interviews and the legislation content analysis correspond to the situation where the governance principles of participation, transparency and accountability are not respected in the process of creation of forest management plans.

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1. Introduction

The concept of planning in forestry can be described as an active process requiring careful thought about what could or should happen in the future. It is also defined as an integral component of forest management; it is about determining and expressing the goals and objectives which government, rural communities or companies have, and for deciding the targets and steps that should be taken in order to achieve those objectives (FAO, 1998). However, the achievement of these future conditions depends on the capacities – organizational, political, social, economic, ecologic, and institutional. Nowadays, the ultimate topic on a global level is the sustainable use of nature resources. In that sense the forest management planning should be

considered as a mean of identifying what can be done in order to enhance and protect values, including wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber, livestock ranching, inheritance and others (Perez and Kuhns, 2012). Existence of wide range of values requires applying participation from the very beginning of the planning process. Thus, the management plan, as a technical planning document, must organize a communication (Chauvin, 2002) internal and external or to involve all stakeholders from the beginning of the process. The importance of a participatory approach for integrated resource management is generally accepted by resource managers, but typically only from the perspective of how to get a plan done and implemented quickly (Shannon, 2002).

The main goal of this paper is to determine whether governance principles like participation, accountability and transparency are involved in the process of forest management planning in Republic of Macedonia.

In this respect, the paper raises the following research questions:

1. Which governance principles are involved in the regulatory framework related to forest management planning?
2. What is the situation in the field? Which obligatory governance principles are implemented in the field?
3. Are participation, transparency and accountability part of the process of forest management planning?

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* Corresponding author at: UKIM Faculty of Forestry 1000 Skopje. Tel.: +389 75599707.

E-mail addresses: makedonka@sf.ukim.edu.mk, makedonkastojanovska@gmail.com

(M. Stojanovska), marina.miovska@studenti.unipd.it, marina.miovska@foper.org

(M. Miovska), jana.jovanovska@foper.net, jana.jovanovska@gmail.com (J. Jovanovska),

vlatko_5@hotmail.com, vladimir.stojanovski@foper.org (V. Stojanovski).

¹ Tel.: +39 3428884079.

² Tel.: +381 38970608446.

³ Tel.: +43 38978476266.

2. Methodology

In order to discover whether the process of preparation of forest management plans takes into consideration the three governance principles and at same time to describe the level of implementation in practice, of each of the investigated principles, the qualitative research method as a combination of descriptive and exploratory examination was used.

The secondary data analysis consists of arguments based on analysis of laws, rules and accepted principles. Additionally, the primary data collection was based on five in depth interviews based on a semi structured questionnaire prepared for the purpose of this study. The interviews were conducted with relevant policy makers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE) presented by the Forestry and Hunting Inspectorate, Public Enterprise Macedonian Forest (PEMF), the Faculty of Forestry of the Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and one NGO. The interviewed considered the employees directly involved in the investigated process, chosen randomly. Led by the paper topic, the questionnaire itself was respectively divided into three parts, covering the three governance principles – participation, transparency and accountability. Having conducted the interviews, the data were processed by transcribing those interviews that underwent qualitative analysis. Document data were collected by analysing the content of the relevant policy documents in forestry covering the Law on forest and the Rulebooks for preparation of forest management plans. Here, the key words “management”, “participation”, “transparency”, “accountability” and their synonyms and related meaning have been researched within the documents' context, in order to establish their presence and the manner in which they have been mentioned in the documents.

This method is intended to underpin the assessment of the implementation of the governance principles in a jurisdiction and to provide a framework for policy discussions. The ultimate purpose of the assessment is to identify the nature and extent of specific strengths and weaknesses in forest governance, and thereby underpin policy dialogue that will identify reform priorities leading to the improvement of forest governance and economic performance of the state.

3. Theoretical background

This chapter offers a review of several articles concerning the field of governance principles in the process of forest management planning.

In previous times the term governance was synonymously related to government, on what refers the definition provided by the 'Concise Oxford Dictionary'. Only after the 80s, political scientists referred to the term as the distinct from of government, at the same time including the civil society actors as well (Kjaer, 2011). Some authors define the term of Governance as “self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the State” (Rhodes, 1997).

The rationalist model analyzed by several scholars (Etzioni, 1967; Buttoud and Yunusova, 2002b) is based on a deductive chain of decisions taken by the public authority, considering the forestry sector as well. In this case the public institutions bring the decisions expressed through the choices made for the benefit of the society, without any consideration of the needs and interests expressed by users. In this case the term and the characteristics of “government” are still present and recognizable, instead of the new trend of “governance”. Thus, it seems that new planning approaches are necessary for an effective implementation of multiple goals in forest management: the conventional fact-based (or expert-based) decision-making process combined with the interest-based (or stakeholder-based) decision-making process (Weiss et al., 2002).

The literature (Baskent et al., 2005; Graham et al., 2003; Paletto, 2002; Shannon, 1987, 2002; Weiss et al., 2002) gives several illustrations of the procedure of governance principles in creation of forest

management plans. Some of the scholars which work on the governance issue, (Agere, 2000; Baskent et al., 2005; Brun and Buttoud, 2002; Graham et al., 2003) agree that governance principles need to be involved in forest management planning. Inclusion of the participation principle in the forest management planning often offers opportunities for better management of scarce natural resources, keeping in mind the complexity, limitations and many times lack of guarantee in finding desired solutions. By now there are only rare examples in mountain forest management where the public or different stakeholders are included into the planning process within a clear formal framework (Weiss et al., 2002). Forest managers seem to accept new changes in the planning process with resistance and refusal, partly because of the political control and management activities already prescribed in the political agenda. This situation continues today even though there are many individuals who are excellent in engaging the public and creating positive collaborative management partnerships (Shannon, 1987, 1990). However, participation by control actors is often understood as keeping the cards in their own favour while allowing others to have their saying in not one transparent and top-down rational way.

Professional literature defines the principles of participation and accountability by the “ecosystem approach” which is explained as “a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way” whereas: “Different sectors of society view ecosystems in terms of their own economic, cultural and societal needs. Indigenous peoples and other local communities living on the land are important stakeholders and their rights and interests should be recognized. (...). Societal choices should be expressed as clearly as possible. (...) Management should involve all stakeholders and balance local interests with the wider public interest. The closer management is to the ecosystem, the greater the responsibility, ownership, accountability, participation, and use of local knowledge.” (COP V/6, 2000)

In such a participation level during the process of forest management planning, the planners and scientists must not only make their assumptions and analyses clear to one another, but also explain themselves fully and clearly to stakeholders and the public. (Shannon, 2002) Thus, transparency facilitates more meaningful participation by ensuring that all motivations and objectives are apparent and that all information vital to the decision is presented and is reliable (Shannon, 2002).

Transparency and accountability (T&A) have emerged over the past decade as key ways to address both developmental failures and democratic deficits (Gaventa and McGee, 2010).

However, accountability is not simple at all. Different stakeholders are concerned with different aspects of the forest. When accountability is mentioned, that immediately raises the question of who is responsible for what. For instance, if the United States is taken as an example, the responsibility is spread among levels of Government, agencies, and property owners (Shannon, 2002).

4. Results

4.1. General data about forestry

Republic of Macedonia is positioned in the southeast part of Europe and occupies a central and important place on the Balkan Peninsula, with a territory of 25,713 km². As one of the six republics of the former Yugoslavia, Republic of Macedonia proclaimed its independence in 1992, shifting from one party into pluralistic regime and changing the monopolistic into market economy.

With respect to forestry, Republic of Macedonia is an economy branch that participates in the Gross National Product with 0.3 to 0.5%, but if multifunctional uses would be monetized the contribution would be considerably higher. The contribution of the forest industry (primary and secondary wood processing, furniture, paper and

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