Conflict resolution through collaboration: Preconditions and limitations in forest and nature conservation controversies ☆

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ABSTRACT

Increasing competition over the world's forest resources will likely aggravate conflict, though conflict should not be seen as bad *per se*. As the challenge is to develop institutions and practices capable of handling conflict constructively, various collaborative approaches involving disputing actors are evolving worldwide. In Sweden, most such approaches pertain to protected areas and few involve commercial forestry. The reasons for the rise of different approaches to collaboration in protected areas and commercially managed forest lands are explored through a comparison of two conflicts embedded in different management regimes. The study suggests that actor interdependence is critical to how collaboration evolves. Interdependence is in turn affected by the institutions, discourses, and economic context in which the process is embedded. When contextual factors are unfavourable, power relations too unequal, and interdependencies between dominant and subordinated actors weak, the prospects for collaboration are slim. In an enabling context, in contrast, mobilization may alter power relations and interdependencies, making collaboration possible. This study suggests that the low occurrence of collaborative land use planning in many parts of Sweden may be related to the presence of strong economic land use interests, un-successful mobilization of weaker parties, and absence of enabling institutional and discursive factors.

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1. Introduction

Increasing competition over the world's forest resources will likely aggravate conflict (Beland Lindahl and Westholm, 2011a, 2011b), not least the conflict with nature conservation interests. The challenge is to develop institutions and practices capable of handling conflict constructively, and common approaches include various forms of collaborative planning that attempt to involve the disputing actors (Daniels and Walker, 2001; Gray, 1989; Raitio, 2008; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). In recent decades, efforts to increase participation of affected citizens in environmental decision making constitute a general trend influencing forest governance in many parts or the world. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, the decentralization of natural resource management, devolution reforms, and participatory/collaborative forest management approaches appear to be on the rise (see e.g. Bose, 2013–this issue; Pravat and Humphreys, 2013–this issue; Ravikumar et al., 2013–this issue). In Canada, collaborative approaches have been used to settle long-standing forest policy conflicts in British Columbia (Raitio and Saarikoski, 2012).

These global trends are reflected in Swedish nature conservation policy (SEPA and SFA, 2005; Swedish Government Communication, 2001/02:173). There is a growing number of examples of evolving co-management processes in response to conflicts over the designation of protected areas, such as the Fulufjället (Zachrisson, 2009b) and Koster national parks. Conflicts over nature conservation tend to be much more intense in areas with commercial forestry but as of yet there are few examples, and studies, of inclusive collaborative processes in such areas (Beland Lindahl, 2008; Lisberg Jensen, 2002). In the present paper, we explore possible reasons to why conflicts in relation to nature conservation are handled with collaboration in areas with no commercial forestry, but not where forests are commercially managed. Much of the literature on natural resource conflicts and collaborative planning theory addresses procedural aspects, while contextual aspects have received less attention. Raitio (2013–this issue) argues that the broader societal structures in which collaborative processes are embedded influence the options and leverage of the actors involved (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Kyllönen et al., 2006). She highlights a need to combine the "micro" perspective of the procedures with the "macro" perspective of the socio–political context. This study responds to this need by comparing the collaborative processes *and* contextual factors of two forest related conflicts embedded in different management regimes.

To investigate the "micro" level, we use Gray's (1989) collaboration process model which helps us structure, describe, and compare the evolution of the conflicts which are both located in Jokkmokk Municipality,

northern Sweden. The first, the "Forest Survey", illustrates a conflict between commercial forestry and nature conservation, i.e. establishment of protected areas, in commercially managed forest lands. The second, "Laponia", is about upgrading already protected areas to form a World Heritage Site. In this case, nature conservation ambitions are in conflict with another economic activity, reindeer husbandry, but within an existing protected area regime. Since the geographical localization of these cases overlap, several of the actors were involved in both cases. Some of the "actor characteristics", such as the amount of trust, the history and quality of relationships and identity perceptions (see Lewicki, 2006), is therefore similar in the two cases. Consequently, we have chosen to focus our analysis of the "micro" level on the procedural aspects. To explore the interactions between the "micro" and "macro" level, we draw on Raitio's (2013–this issue) Discursive Institutional Conflict Management Analysis (DICMA) framework. The objective of the paper is to discuss preconditions for handling forest-related nature conservation conflicts through collaborative processes, and the implications of the broader societal structures in which these conflicts are embedded. Particular attention is paid to the importance of institutions and institutional shifts, economic conditions, and available discourses.

2. Theoretical framework: combining process and context

Preconditions for successful collaboration in terms of process characteristics are extensively discussed in the literature. Actor inclusion, stakeholder incentives, power relations, communication and learning skills, and accountability are among the factors that influence the success of collaborative processes (Daniels and Walker, 2001; Gray, 1989; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). Raitio (2013–this issue) introduces a new framework for studying conflict management processes. It is inspired by discursive institutionalism and combines the analysis of collaborative conflict management processes with the underlying institutional and discursive factors. The approach rests on the three commonly recognized new institutionalisms, i.e., rational choice, historical, and sociological institutionalisms (see Hall and Taylor, 1996), and advocates a need to take ideas and discourses more seriously when explaining the politics of change (see also Arts and Buizer, 2009; Schmidt, 2008).

Raitio argues for a combined analysis of context and process. We use Gray's collaboration model (1989) to explore the process characteristics through a number of critical phases (in Raitio's terms, *practices*) that are involved in reaching the implementation of a joint decision. In the problem-setting phase, *actors* with legitimate stakes and the right and capacity to participate are identified. A *problem definition*, ideally sufficiently broad to incorporate the concerns of all stakeholders, should be developed, and this is enhanced when *interdependence* is recognized (Daniels and Walker, 2001; Gray, 1989). Parties are dependent to the degree to which they perceive themselves as having a stake in the relationship from which conflict arises. When their goals are interlinked in such a way that they represent a possible win-win situation, interdependence is positive (Deutsch, 2006). Access to certain resources, such as expertise, control over the policy process, and ability to represent constituencies, is also important to the power relation between conflicting parties and their perception of interdependence (Daniels and Walker, 2001). When the resources are very unequally distributed, the weaker parties must persuade the stronger ones that they are actually interdependent, doing this, for example, by increasing their ability to represent and mobilize a constituency (Sidaway, 2005). The next phase of the collaboration process, *direction-setting*, ideally starts with the establishment of appropriate *ground rules* for how the parties will interact and how decisions are to be made. The following steps are *agenda-setting*, when substantive issues are discussed, *organization of sub-groups* with diverse membership, *joint information searches*, and *exploration of multiple options*, when the parties are expected to think creatively in terms of trade-offs and acceptable solutions (Gray, 1989).

One factor considered critical to the outcome of a collaborative process is actor access to alternatives (Gray, 1989). Negotiation theorists use the concept of best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA) to explore various parties' bargaining positions. The reason one negotiates, Fisher and Ury (1981) argue, is to produce something better than the results obtainable without negotiating. One's BATNA is consequently the standard against which any proposed agreement should be measured. However, the attractiveness of the options available to actors is affected by societal factors external to the collaborative process. In other words, the BATNAs of the various actors are influenced by the broader institutional, economic, and social contexts in which the conflict is embedded (see Raitio, 2013–this issue).

Accordingly, we assume that to understand the potential of a collaborative approach, we must pay attention to contextual factors such as institutions, discourses/frames, and economic interests. Raitio (2013–this issue) explains how institutions, understood as formal rules as well as informal norms, and discourses relate to each other and can be treated as separate analytical categories. In short, institutions define the context within which repertoires of more or less acceptable (and expectable) ideas and discursive interactions develop (for a comprehensive account, see Raitio, 2013–this issue). In contrast to Raitio, who conceptualises discourses as "frames", we use the term "discourse" to capture how meaning constructions and ideas shape conflicts and their management. We draw on Schmidt's understanding of discourses as the interactive process by which ideas are conveyed: what is said when, where, how, and by whom (Schmidt, 2008).

3. Methodology: Comparing two forest-related conflicts in Jokkmokk municipality

The empirical focus of this article is on two forest-related conflicts in Jokkmokk, a large (18,143 km^2) but sparsely populated municipality (approximately 5000 inhabitants). Approximately 20% of the populace is Sami, an indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia. Roughly half the land area is mountain tundra and the rest is boreal forest. Forestry, hydropower production, Sami reindeer husbandry, and tourism are important economic activities. The area is also well known for its national parks and harbours documented nature conservation values of national and international significance. This study examines two open forest-related conflicts in this municipality. Both conflicts related to institutional change, implied trade-offs between nature conservation and commercial land uses (e.g., forestry and reindeer husbandry) and involved overlapping groups of actors. However, they were embedded in different management regimes in which forestry, in the one case, and reindeer husbandry, in the other, represented dominating land use activities. The Forest Survey conflict was not resolved to the satisfaction of all actors and still lingers under the surface. The conflict over the management of the Laponia World Heritage Site, on the other hand, was settled through an inclusive collaborative process resulting in a co-management institution. Can these similarities and differences help us understand why collaboration could be used to resolve one of the conflicts but did not evolve as an alternative in the other?

This paper is a synthesis of the results of two previously published studies: the Forest Survey study was presented by Beland Lindahl (2008) and the Laponia study by Zachrisson (2009a). Both were designed as qualitative single-case studies and employed process tracing (George and Bennett, 2005). The Forest Survey case covered the 2002–2006 period and the Laponia case 2005–2009. Both studies are based mainly on documented interviews (29 in the Forest Survey study and 16 in Laponia) with key informants representing the actors involved in the processes, such as local, regional, and state officials, representatives of Sami reindeer herding communities (RHCs), businesses, and environmental nongovernmental organizations (E-NGOs). In addition, documentary sources, including official policy documents, meeting minutes, and newspaper articles, were analysed. In this article, the results of Beland Lindahl (2008) and Zachrisson (2009a) are used in a