Myths on local use of natural resources and social equity of land use governance: Reindeer herding in Finland

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Previous literature on social equity has focused on procedure, distribution and recognition related to land use governance. We propose novel approach to examine social equity by following ideational turn with an aim to explore globally used and locally persistent myths that (mis)inform governance in practice and effect on the three dimensions of social equity for reindeer herding in northern Finland. We take synthetizing approach and elaborate and employ a comparative cognitive mapping method to classify the reviewed literature according to its linkage to the three dimensions of social equity, and type of relationship (utilizing, questioning, contextualizing) to the examined four myths. The myths of "tragedy of the commons", "non-human wilderness ideal", "noble savages", and "majority will constituting democracy" are persistently used in land use governance mainly because they provide justifications for furthering particular interest. Yet, these myths are also widely questioned due to the problems that their employment produces for reindeer herders. Furthermore, the background assumptions of the myths are often somewhat problematic. We discuss reinterpretation of these myths revolving around 1) a holistic approach, 2) considering non-indigenous local people as noble savages, 3) problems of melding herders as a stakeholder group similar to other groups, 4) steps from majority democracy towards self-governance, 5) whether social equity can be bought, and 6) biocultural diversity. These reinterpretations can inform land use policy and governance also beyond the case study. Therefore, critical view on the explanatory and constitutive powers of myths should be part of the portfolios to achieve social equity.

1. Introduction

Perhaps the most urgent challenge for international environmental policy and governance related to social equity are the impacts of climate change on global south produced by global north (Rantala et al., 2015) or impacts of climate change on small island states in the pacific and on the Arctic. In addition to global scale processes with high-level policy discussions, social equity issues and uneven relations are deeply present also at local level land use governance. For example, the opportunities to practice local livelihoods may erode by increasing extractive industries, which may not provide much benefits, but on the contrary pose harms for the local livelihood practitioners. Unlike concepts of environmental justice, fairness and equality, the notion of social equity is relative and context specific, and proposes that the groups who do not produce the impacts, but are most affected should be favored with affirmative governance actions, also more than those less

affected (McDermott et al., 2013; McKendry, 2016; Sarkki et al., 2017).

It is commonly considered that social equity has distributional and procedural dimensions (see Leventhal, 1980; Rantala et al., 2015). We put forward a definition according to which social equity has four dimensions. 1) Procedure (affected stakeholders should be more closely involved in decision-making than more distant stakeholders). 2) Distribution (the stakeholders bearing the costs of development should also be most compensated). 3) Recognition (accounting also for local stakeholders' knowledge, culture and values). 4) Context (acknowledging how social conditions, such as power dynamics, education and gender, influence groups' ability to gain recognition, participate in decision-making, and lobby for fair distribution) (Pascual et al., 2014). The procedure (Ribot, 2002; Batterbury, 2006; Bebbington, 2006; Wilson and Stammler, 2016), distribution (Perreault, 2006; Heynen et al., 2007; Walker, 2007), and recognition (Coulthard, 2007; Von der Porten et al., 2015) have been widely researched, whereas the significance of

social context for social equity in environmental governance has received less attention (see DeCaro and Stokes, 2013; Sarkki et al., 2015).

Social contexts can be understood as economic, social and political structures and realities, but also as ideas shaping and interacting with material reality (see Burke et al., 2009). The so-called ideational turn puts emphasis on causal impacts of ideas on political economy and governance (Blyth, 1997; Gofas and Hay, 2010). Ideational research has been conducted since the 1990's, but with still a need to identify ideational variables, ways by which they shape contexts and motivations of actors in policy and governance, and to develop methods to analyze the links between ideas and governance (Finlayson, 2006; Berman, 2012; Van Esch et al., 2016). Methods that have been used in ideational studies include critical discourse analysis, rhetorical political analysis, narrative analysis, metaphor analysis, and quantitative textual analyses. In this study, we apply comparative cognitive mapping, which focuses on developing cognitive maps displaying relationships between concepts (Axelrod, 1976; Van Esch, 2015).

Myths are particular kind of ideas and crucial to social equity, because they serve to explain and justify specific forms of behaviour with its origins, and they tend to reproduce ideologies, reinforce power structures and rationalize social roles (Malinowski, 1926; Barthes, 1972). Myths also structure and provide readymade problem definitions, which ground motivations for solutions in natural resource governance in ways that conceal alternative conceptualisations and views (de Neufville and Barton, 1987). Furthermore, myths and reality may become mutually reinforcing: *"Society is structured to conform to the apparent truths that the myth reveals, and what is taken as real increasingly takes on the colour of the myth."* (Cavanaugh, 2009, 6). It is just this taken-for-granted knowledge, which shapes stakeholders pre-determined positions towards governance solutions making the myths problematic. Therefore, when thinking how to improve social equity of governance, it is often so that changing patterns of power and taken-for-granted explanations requires that also the underlying myths are transformed (Barclay, 2016), or reinterpreted. Reinterpretation is needed because the use of myths, regardless their contradictory or even false character, function as legitimizing strategy (Slotte and Halme-Tuomisaari, 2015) that inform and guide policy making at various levels (Bliesemann de Quevara, 2016), and have material effects via changing the use of the natural resources (Berdej et al., 2015).

The links between myths, social equity and environmental governance has, however, remained little examined. Myths inform preferable governance solutions to arrange relationships between policy makers, market actors, civil society, local communities, and science (Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Ménard, 2012; OECD, 2017). We use the concept of myths (rather than narratives, norms, belief systems, stories, paradigms or theories), because of its colloquial use, as something not necessarily or likely true and therefore in need of further scrutiny. We use the reindeer herding in Finland as a case study to analyze the explanatory and constitutive powers of ideas by looking particularly into the role of myths as persistent narratives and as key assumptions. As such, myths lead to specific understandings and misunderstandings on sustainable natural resource governance solutions affecting social equity (cf. Cronon, 1992; Hutton et al., 2005; West et al., 2006; Barclay, 2016; Berdej et al., 2015; Bliesemann de Quevara, 2016).

The reindeer herding district covers around one third of the land in Finland and is divided into 54 Reindeer Herding Cooperatives (RHC). The southern parts of the reindeer herding district are used by ethnically Finnish herders and the northernmost RHCs by the Sámi, the indigenous minority group living in northern parts of Fennoscandia and Kola Peninsula (Russia). In Finland, unlike in Sweden and Norway, also non-Sami people have traditionally engaged in reindeer herding at least from 18th century when northern Finnish peasants learned the trade from southern Sámi (Kortesalmi, 2007). Due to joint historical developments and cultural amalgamations many herding families and communities have been and are mixed ones and many northern Finns have

learnt to consider reindeer herding as essential part of their cultural heritage and are truly proud of it. Thus, we consider both Sámi and Finn herders as culturally unique groups with centuries old heritage and that they should be targeted by affirmative governance actions to sustain the continuity of reindeer herding culture. In Finland, Norway and Sweden state-based governance has largely failed to fully decolonize historical land use practices and property rights, to secure the development and continuance of reindeer herding by regulating industrialization of multiuse landscapes, and to justly govern interactions between herders and other stakeholders (Saarinen, 2005; Löf, 2014; Sarkki et al., 2016a, 2016b). Indeed, disputes over land use in northern Finland are often more or less directly entangled with the legacies of Nordic colonialist policies and practices having relevance even today (see Naum and Nordin, 2013; Ojala and Nordin, 2015). Concrete problems regarding social equity of land use governance for reindeer herders include fragmentation and deterioration of pastures due to various land uses (e.g. forestry, reservoirs, nature conservation, mining, tourism), (alleged) over-grazing, prolonged conflicts between herders and other land users, lack of possibilities for herders influence decision making, lack of formal recognition of indigenous land rights, and prioritizing nature conservation (e.g. large carnivore protection, protected areas) over herders' development objectives.

The objective of this synthesis paper is to analyze the implications of myths on social equity of land use governance for reindeer herders in northern Finland. We put forward a definition, which considers myths as a specific type of social context that have implications on the three other dimensions of social equity: procedure, distribution and recognition. The four examined myths are "tragedy of the commons", "non-human wilderness ideal", "the noble savage", and "majority will constituting democracy". The four myths were selected based on their global relevance and their strong link to social equity in respect to reindeer herders. Furthermore, these myths are recurrent in academic texts, policy discussion and news reporting and even though there are also other myths as well as broader societal discourses at play, these myths capture some core arguments that reindeer herders need to navigate. In line with the comparative cognitive mapping, which seeks to establish links between abstract ideas (Axelrod, 1976; Van Esch, 2015), we map reviewed papers in terms of their relationships to the concept of social equity and their type of relationship (utilizing, questioning, contextualizing) to the studied ideas: the myths. After having explored the myths critically, we suggest five ways to reinterpret the myths towards improving social equity in land use governance for reindeer herders.

While the reindeer herding case is specific, the examination of the myths enables tackling the broader issues of the politics of nature, human-environment relations, indigeneity, and environmental governance that are all relevant today also for other pastoral practices, nature-based livelihoods, and rural development in general. The study is relevant for scientists, and for those involved in the designing, analyzing and implementing policies and practical decisions associated with rural small-scale nature-based livelihoods like reindeer herding. In particular, decision-makers benefit from the study by recognizing often neglected underlying dimension guiding the decisions: the myths. We do not only criticize the thinking along the myths, but provide methodology to critically examine the implications of ideas to land use governance and policy, and offer examples on how to reinterpret the myths to enhance social equity of land use governance.

2. The four examined myths and reindeer herding

First examined myth is the tragedy of the commons. The tragedy of the commons is widely used to inform environmental governance for example by conceptualizing biodiversity and ecosystem services and climate as global commons (e.g. Duraiappah et al., 2014; Pollitt, 2014), and to justify privatization with questionable grounds and severe consequences (Heynen et al., 2007; Angus, 2008). Hardin's, 1968 "tragedy