



# What role for frames in scalar conflicts?

Nataly Juerges\*, Jens Newig

*Institute for Environmental and Sustainability Communication, Leuphana University Lüneburg, Scharnhorststraße 1, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany*



## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 30 January 2015

Received in revised form 16 June 2015

Accepted 8 August 2015

### Keywords:

Conflict  
Framing  
Multi-level governance  
Scale  
Wind energy  
Sustainability transition

## ABSTRACT

To meet growing demands of renewable energy, wind farms are increasingly planned and situated in forested lands. This stirs novel conflicts, which are often not strictly technological in nature. Instead, perceptions and narratives of affected actors play an important role in the development of such conflicts. As often in land-use decision, this involves conflicts over the right spatial scale on which decisions should be taken. This study empirically examines how conflicts over the most appropriate governance scale for decision-making are rooted in the different frames of involved actors. Based on 44 qualitative interviews in the German states of Lower Saxony and Rhineland-Palatinate, this study provides evidence for the value of frame theory for understanding scaling conflicts. Furthermore, the study is helpful to wind energy policy makers because it illustrates how actors perceive the strength and weaknesses of decision-making at different governance scales. The findings imply that frame reflection should become more integrated into conflict management practices because conflict over the most appropriate governance scale can be based on different perceptions of what the conflict is about and which scales of action are required.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Climate change and the transition towards a sustainable, renewable energy system are major challenges of our time. The future of forests is closely linked to these challenges because forest area use and management are modified through changes in climate and energy policies (Beland Lindahl and Westholm, 2012; Eckerberg and Sandström, 2013). Furthermore, climate change and energy transition are important aspects of natural resources conflict management research because these challenges add additional interests and functions to the concept of multifunctional, sustainable forest use (Eckerberg and Sandström, 2013).

Recently, conflict about the construction of wind energy turbines in forests became an important issue in Germany as well as other parts of the world, illustrating this new type of conflict. Wind energy conflicts are multi-faceted, and include: the deliberation of conservation interests and renewable energy production, the distribution of financial benefits of renewable energy projects, and conflicting perceptions about the scenic value of different landscapes (Cowell, 2010; Nadaï and van der Horst, 2010; Ohl and Eichhorn, 2010; Liebal and Weber, 2013; Sutherland and Holstead, 2014). Wind energy constitutes a new type of environmental

conflict. Unlike concerns over fossil fuels, the conflict over wind energy does not arise between economic and ecological interests, but rather between different dimensions of sustainable development (Ohl and Eichhorn, 2010). Wind energy conflicts are usually not strictly based on disagreements about technical aspects (Nadaï and van der Horst, 2010); instead, they are often based on conflicting perceptions and narratives of different stakeholder groups (Devine-Wright, 2005; Cowell, 2010; Nadaï and van der Horst, 2010).

One important aspect of wind energy conflicts is the question of which governance scale is most appropriate to hold the decision-making competency on wind turbines in forests, e.g., the municipality, a regional planning area, or the state. Choosing between different governance scales for decision-making is a fundamental problem of federal, multi-level systems (Koontz, 2002; Oates, 2002) and is particularly prominent in environmental governance (Benson and Jordan, 2010; Dore and Lebel, 2010; Moss and Newig, 2010). Often, the decision-making scale is not matter of choice because competences might be clearly assigned. However, in many cases it is less clear in whose competence a certain problem should lie (Oates, 2002). Two aspects are relevant here. One is the choice to be made in the sense of allocating decision-making competences within a multi-level governance system. This is an issue discussed widely in the literature on (environmental) federalism (Oates, 2002; Newig and Fritsch, 2009). This happens not only as part of administrative reforms, but regularly through

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [nataly.juerges@leuphana.de](mailto:nataly.juerges@leuphana.de) (N. Juerges).

the introduction of new regulations. As new policy issues emerge, there invariably is the decision of which decision-making scale will deal with it. Sometimes, competent authorities devolve decision-making competences to smaller scales, thereby rescaling parts of the governance system. The second aspect concerns the choice of a scale through non-state actors who, for instance, choose among different scales to lobby for their own agenda, such as by engaging in venue shopping (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). In reality, the distribution of authority between different governance scales is often subject to negotiation between different actors and can become changed if actors are successful in controlling scaling processes in a way that suits their interests (Thiel, 2015). Such negotiations are particularly relevant in federal states with multiple potential scales of decision-making (Thiel, 2015) and have generally become more salient because of the multi-scale nature of environmental problems (Gibson et al., 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Benson and Jordan, 2010; Cash and Moser, 2000; Kok and Veldkamp, 2011).

The choice of a decision-making scale is often highly controversial. It has been argued that different mental models of environmental problems affect scaling processes to manage those problems (Thiel, 2015). Different actors often vehemently disagree about the most suitable scale for addressing environmental problems. Previous studies have suggested that different frames, narratives or perspectives of the same issue constitute the core of conflicts (e.g., Schön and Rein, 1994; Putnam and Wondolleck, 2003; Brumanns et al., 2008; Aasetre and Vik 2013; Wiest et al., 2015). Framing is understood as the way things are seen by actors based on their, “structures of belief, perception, and appreciation” (Schön and Rein, 1994:23), for example, if an actor perceives an environmental problem, such as deforestation, as a local problem, as an issue that requires national action, or as an occurrence which does not require any political response of any local or national jurisdiction. Conflicts based on different frames of a controversy are widely intractable because, “frames determine what counts as a fact and what arguments are to be relevant and compelling” (Schön and Rein, 1994:23).

This study explores if the underlying reasons for wind energy-related conflicts about the most suitable decision-making scale are related to different perceptions of an issue or frames (van Lieshout et al., 2011).

There is extensive literature on both scale choice and frame theory in natural resource conflict management studies. However, there is a lack of studies that focus on the relationship between these two important topics (van Lieshout et al., 2011). In order to fill this research gap, this study examines the relation between framing and scaling conflicts through a case study of wind energy conflicts in forested areas in Germany. Specifically, three questions are addressed:

1. How do different frames of wind energy in forests of involved state and non-state actors impact the development of conflict about the most suitable governance scale for decision-making?
2. In what ways do involved actors argue for a change in the decision-making scale and how do they justify their choice for specific governance scales?

What implications do the relationship between different frames and re-scaling strategies of involved actors have for the management of conflicts over wind energy in forests?

First, the theoretical background of the study is presented; next, the empirical findings of the case study on wind energy conflicts in two states of Germany are presented. The results indicate that the framing of wind energy projects in forests by different actors has a substantial effect on which decision-making scale is considered as appropriate. Furthermore, different framings can pose a major obstacle to finding compromises in conflicts regarding the

right scale for regulation and decision-making. Therefore, the complex relationship of framing and scaling deserves more integrative attention in conflict governance research.

## 2. Theoretical background

Scale choice for decision-making and framing typically received attention in separate areas of the environmental and natural resource management literature. Few studies explicitly combine these approaches in environmental governance research (e.g., Dore and Lebel, 2010; Vreugdenhil et al., 2010; van Lieshout et al., 2011).

### 2.1. Why actors try to change the scale of conflicts

The allocation of decision-making authority between different scales, e.g., the municipality or the state, is a highly political question (Mostert, 2015). Different actors apply different strategies trying to change the allocation of decision-making authority between different decision-making points at different scales. For example, this can be members of the government with the formal authority to move decision-making competences of a certain issue from one decision-making point to another, e.g., from regional planning authorities to the municipalities. This can also be a non-state actor, such as an interest group, who argues in favor of re-allocating decision-making authority, e.g., from the municipalities to a newly created decision-making point covering the scale of a forest ecosystem. The theoretical explanations of why actors aim to change the scale of conflicts or to shift decision-making competence vary. Previous studies have shown that struggles for decision-making authority or influence on decision-makers often play an important role in the causes and development of conflicts over scale. Perceived opportunities of interest realization based on different actor constellations at different scales (Gibson et al., 2000), were identified as important reason for conflicts about the most appropriate scale of decision-making. Koontz (2002) found that there were, indeed, systematic differences in forest policy performance among different governance scales. He showed that economic development and profitable resource use usually perform better at smaller scales of governance while environmental protection and citizen participation tend to be more successful at larger governance scale. For different actors involved in forest use conflicts, it is therefore reasonable to argue in favor of shifting decision-making to another governance scale which favors their interests, or not shifting decision-making competency to another scale if the current allocation of decision-making authority is consistent with their own interests (Koontz, 2002).

Another cause for scaling conflicts are different perceptions about which governance scale would be most appropriate for decision-making in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and/or legitimacy (Vreugdenhil et al., 2010; Raitio, 2013). An actor's perception that another decision-making scale would be more appropriate can be based on the way the actor has framed the conflict (van Lieshout et al. 2011). Different ideologies can be a major reason for conflicting frames because they contribute to the perception that different parties experience different realities (Putnam and Wondolleck, 2003; Wiest et al., 2015). Understanding people's framings of controversial issues is a major concern in environmental conflict analysis (Davis and Lewicki, 2003; Brumanns et al., 2008; Aasetre and Vik, 2013; Jansujwicz et al., 2013) and conflict management in general. In the context of forest management, this implies that actors' framing of forest resources fundamentally impacts the perceived correct decision, which might differ substantially from how other actors perceive the situation.

Previous studies have shown that the framing of forest management issues by some actors can imply that decision-making is seen

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6547790>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6547790>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)