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How involved are they really? A comparative network analysis of the institutional drivers of local actor inclusion

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ABSTRACT

Different socio-economic and environmental drivers lead local communities in mountain regions to adapt land use practices and engage in protection policies. The political system also has to develop new approaches to adapt to those drivers. Local actors are the target group of those policy approaches, and the question arises of if and how much those actors are consulted or even integrated into the design of local land use and protection policies. This article addresses this question by comparing seven different case studies in Swiss mountain regions. Through a formal social network analysis, the inclusion of local actors in collaborative policy networks is investigated and compared to the involvement of other stakeholders representing the next higher sub-national or national decisional levels. Results show that there is a significant difference (1) in how local actors are embedded compared to other stakeholders; and (2) between top-down versus bottom-up designed policy processes.

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Introduction

Studying actor inclusion and participation is of crucial interest in policy process analysis to investigate, on one hand, the procedure of policy design and, on the other, the impact of actors' involvement in decision-making on the final policy output (Diem, 2010; Ingold, 2011). However, not all actor groups are similarly involved in policymaking; in the literature it is argued that local actors' involvement might be of particular relevance in natural resource management and land use policies (Schneider et al., 2003; Ostrom, 2005; Stenseke, 2009; Newig et al., 2010). Local communities are often directly affected by policy fields, potentially benefitting from an enhanced efficiency in policy output production and an increased quality of natural resources. They also benefit by being directly addressed by the policy instruments that they implement and practices they adopt (Knoepfel et al., 2009; Khailani and Perera, 2013).

Local communities live in a particular setting where ecosystems provide a large array of goods and services. These are however highly sensitive to both socio-economic and physical changes (Beniston, 2004; Kampmann et al., 2012). On the local level, actors are therefore challenged to adapt land use practices to this changing environment. The political system, with its policies and governance

structures, has a crucial role to play in mitigating the impact of such changes and enhancing sustainable management practices. Several authors have highlighted the important role of collaborative management and the involvement of local target groups when designing land use policies that should meet future sustainable goals (Ostrom, 2005; Lubell and Fulton, 2007). The question arises of if and how much those actors are consulted and actually integrated into the design of local land use and protection policies.

This article addresses this question by comparing seven different case studies in the Swiss mountain regions. Through a formal social network analysis, the inclusion of local actors in collaborative policy networks is investigated and is compared to the involvement of other stakeholders representing the next higher sub-national or national decisional levels. More concretely, and through different centrality measures borrowed from social network literature (Freeman, 1979; Granovetter, 1992), we assess actors' structural (local and global) embeddedness in land use and protection policy processes. Local actors are defined as organizations or agencies, acting on the municipal (in contrast to sub-national/cantonal or national) level, and representing public or private interests.

This article thus contributes to this discussion in three ways: first, by empirically assessing the actual inclusion of local actors compared to the involvement of other stakeholders representing the next higher sub-national or national decisional levels. Second, we conceptually and empirically identify different (institutional) drivers for local actors' inclusion. More concretely, here it is investigated whether formal rules of vertical (from the higher to the lower institutional level) and horizontal (the inclusion of state and non-state actors) actors integration decisively impact upon the actual

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inclusion of local stakeholders in policy design. And, finally, actors' inclusion is assessed via structural embeddedness and different centrality measures borrowed from social network analysis. This article is structured as follows: first, the inclusion of local actors in policy processes in general, and land use and protection policies in particular, is defined from a policy analysis perspective. A particular focus lies on the drivers for actors' inclusion differing between top-down versus bottom-up designed processes; and in defining the dependent variable by using different centrality measures borrowed from social network analysis. After introducing the seven case studies and data gathering, we will analyze how many local actors in each region were formally involved; and then assess to what degree they were embedded in the studied policy processes. In section five, the potential difference between top-down versus bottom-up designed processes will be discussed; and, in the last section, conclusions will be drawn about the general challenges involved in integrating local communities in land use and protection policies.

Local actors involvement in land use policy

We aim to highlight three different aspects of local actors' inclusion: first, by generally defining actors' inclusion in policy processes and thereby focusing on local actors; second, by investigating the impact that the institutional design (formal rules of inclusion) may have on the actual inclusion of local actors; and, finally, by highlighting the relevance of the adoption of a network approach to address inclusion via structural embeddedness.

Local actors' inclusion

Different scholars address the issue of actors inclusion when it comes to studying changes in the institutional political setting (March and Olsen, 1996), the study of competence shifts (Hooghe and Marks, 2003) or the link between decision-making processes and policy outputs (Kriesi, 1980). They highlight *formal rules* that should guarantee that different types of actors are included in the design of policies.

But do such formal rules lead to actual involvement and thus the observable participation of actors?

Several studies already emphasize the crucial difference between formally introduced and actually implemented participatory principles in decision-making (Ingold et al., 2010; Bernauer and Gampfer, 2013). These studies highlight that it not only seems important that actors should, but also that they actually do participate in policy processes. In the multi-level governance literature, actors' inclusion is principally conceptualized as the observable or real involvement of actors belonging to different decisional levels and sectors (Bolleyer and Börzel, 2010). The aim of this research is thus to simultaneously answer the questions of what drivers might influence actors' inclusion (2.2); and empirically and methodologically investigate this (2.3).

But the question arises of what type of actor to concentrate on to further conceptualize inclusion?

Local communities seem to be particularly affected by formal rules of integration (Bottazzi and Dao, 2013): especially when vertical and downward shifts in policy design induce their increased involvement; and when horizontal shifts particularly impact upon them (as a result of local communities often representing a wide range of societal interests). Also, different natural resource management and land use studies convincingly highlight the important role of *local actors* in integration. Several authors point out the relevance of local communities' organizational patterns (Ostrom, 1994), as local actors are particularly affected by resource degradation and land use change (Marin et al., 2012). To assess local actors' inclusion, we compare their involvement to that of other

stakeholders representing the next higher sub-national or national decisional levels.

Drivers for actors' inclusion: policy process design matters

Typically in Europeanization studies (Knill and Lenschow, 1998), in the investigation of liberalization processes (Majone, 2001) and in regional policy designs where non-hierarchical actors arrangements account for the involvement of stakeholders from the (inter)national to the local levels (Eckerberg and Joas, 2004), formal rules are defined to enhance the vertical inclusion of actors. When a policy process follows the principal of sustainable development, it should guarantee not only vertical, but also horizontal actor integration, taking into account stakeholders representing the private and public sector, as well as civil society (see Hirschi, 2010; Smith and Fischlein, 2010). Such vertical and horizontal shifts are very prominent in natural resource management and land use policies (Liefferink et al., 2011). We deduce that formal rules of vertical (from the higher to the lower institutional level) and horizontal (the inclusion of state and non-state actors) actors integration decisively impact upon the actual inclusion of local stakeholders in policy design. More concretely, here we identify the design (bottom-up versus top down) of land use policies as a major driver that might explain to what extent local actors are observably included in policy design. Top-down is defined as a process that is mandated by formal authorities such as executive, legislative or administrative actors usually belonging to the national, or next higher decisional level. Contrary to this, bottom-up processes are defined as being designed by regional and local actors representing civil society or the private sector. The distinction between top-down versus bottom-up thus takes up both the vertical (differentiating cases via the decisional level they are designed at) and the horizontal (differentiating between formal authorities and private actors) characteristics of policy design.

Land use policies in general, and the adaption to short-term events such as natural hazards in particular, are not always designed in a bottom-up way and are not exclusively implemented through participatory processes with local and private actors' involvement. In general, we expect differences in the structural patterns between top-down and bottom-up designed decision-making processes, which is why our first hypothesis guiding this research reads as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Local actors are better included in bottom-up than top-down designed land use and protection projects.

Furthermore, we account for the general vertical structure within each process and control for the level that designed the policy. More concretely, we no longer differentiate between whether formal authorities (top-down) or local private actors (bottom-up) initiated the project. Instead, we argue that the distance between the local actors and the level at which the process was defined impacts upon local actors' inclusion:

Hypothesis 2. The greater the distance between the level that designed a project and the local actors, the less included local actors are.

Social network embeddedness as a pathway to actors' inclusion

Several authors identify the relevance of deliberative and structural approaches when investigating environmental planning, policy and conflict resolution processes (Rauschmayer and Wittmer, 2006; Ingold et al., 2010; Lienert et al., 2013). Adopting a network perspective is said to provide insights into how multi-level governance structures and processes are organized (Glasbergen, 2010; Weiss et al., 2012); and can highlight how

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