



Stakeholder coalitions in forest politics: revision of Finnish Forest Act



Teemu Harrinkari ^{b,*}, Pia Katila ^a, Heimo Karppinen ^{b,c}

^a Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), P.O. Box 18, FI-01301 Vantaa, Finland

^b University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 27, FI-00014 Helsinki Yliopisto, Finland

^c Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), P.O. Box 27, FI-00014, Finland

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ABSTRACT

The Finnish Forest Act was revised in 2010–2013. The need for revision emerged from societal changes manifested through the changing objectives of private forest owners, increasing and diversifying demands for forest goods and services and increasing number of stakeholders, as well as the changes in the forest sector operational environment that relate to the globalisation of markets and influences of international policies. Advocacy Coalition Framework guided this study to identify and describe the belief structures and coordination of advocacy coalitions in the Finnish forest sector in the context of the revision of the Forest Act. Three coalitions were identified on the basis of policy core beliefs and coordination between actors: *Forestry coalition* and *Administrative coalition* derive their normative beliefs from the forest paradigm, whereas *Environmental coalition* derives its beliefs from the environmental paradigm. The differences deriving from the two different paradigms have led to polarised coordination patterns between rival coalitions, minimal communication channels between opponents and a long-term disagreement about major questions in the subsystem. Interestingly, the government seems to have a divided representation in forest policy, since Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and Ministry of Environment contribute via different coalitions. In the future, the success of Finnish forest sector depends on how well it is able to combine different preconditions deriving from these two paradigms.

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1. Introduction

Natural resource policies are often contested and a source of conflicts. One of the key tasks of national forest policy is to deal with different actors' diverse values, interest and expectations. Actors form different affiliations to strengthen their influence in policy processes and over the outcomes of these processes. Networks, coalitions and the influence of different actors have shown to be important in policy processes and explaining policy change (Weible, 2005; Weible et al., 2009; Sotirov and Memmler, 2012).

Studies examining natural resource policy have usually identified two or three main coalitions that seek to influence the policy system. Typically these coalitions consist of a coalition representing economic development and exploitation of natural resources, and a coalition focusing on environmental aspects and nature protection. In cases where three coalitions were identified, the third coalition normally consisted of either representatives of traditional government-led natural resource management organisations, or in some cases representatives of social concerns (Sotirov and Memmler, 2012).

The Finnish forest sector can be described as corporatist, with strong forest administration and historically prone to conflicts. Traditionally

forest policy making has been confined to committees and working groups where the main interest groups represented were forest industry and forest owners. Since 1990s with the rise of environmental consciousness and economic globalisation the numbers of interest groups has increased, and the significance of non-governmental organisations as well as international forest companies has increased (Ollonqvist, 2002; Kotilainen and Rytteri, 2011). Up to 1980 conflicts mainly erupted between private forest owners and forest administration "as the forest authorities failed to recognize the needs of forest owners or were not willing to do so" (Siiskonen, 2007, p. 132). More recently the roots of the conflicts are found in the divide between economic interests and conservation interests (Hellström, 2001; Raitio, 2013). Earlier research has described the Finnish forest sector as strongly polarised identifying two dominant value positions, namely forestry position and nature position. The recognised core values were utility, property rights and value of nature. Utility values were seen to dominate policy discussions. Lack of trust between stakeholders was seen to be a characteristic feature for the polarised policy field (Rantala and Primmer, 2003).

Since the beginning of the 20th century the forest act has formed the corner stone of Finland's forest policy (Hellström and Palo, 1993). Traditionally the goal of the Finnish forest policy has been to maximise the biological productivity of forests and less attention was paid to the economic profitability of forestry and forest conservation (Siiskonen, 2007). In the 1990s, the environmental aspects were incorporated into

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: teemu.harrinkari@alumni.helsinki.fi (T. Harrinkari).

the forest policy and legislation. However, environmentalists and the Sami people have criticised the intensive management of forests, especially in old-growth forests with high natural values (Hellström, 2001).

The latest revision of the Finnish Forest Act took place in 2010–2013. The need for the revision arose from the forest owners' aspiration to increase their self-determination on forest management by reducing the regulation on forest management practices (Anonymous, 2013). Another official goal of the revision was to maintain and improve the biological diversity of forests. A significant unofficial reason that contributed to the revision was a private citizen's complaint to the European Commission on the dual role of the Finnish Forest Centre as a supervisor of the legislation and as an actor providing services to forest owners. The complaint was a key incident, which made the governmental actors realise that the forest legislation was in need of a revision.

The important characteristics of the Finnish forest sector are the historical economic importance of forestry, both for the national economy and development and for rural livelihoods, and the ownership structure that is dominated by private holdings. The total forest area owned by the non-industrial private forest owners accounts for slightly less than two thirds (61%) of the Finnish forestland and their forests are located in the more productive southern part of the country (Kaila and Ihalainen, 2014). The 376,000 forest holdings exceeding one hectare of forest land are owned by 685,000 private owners. The average size of a private forest holding was 28 ha in 2013 (Leppänen and Torvelainen, 2015). Fiscally forests are considered as property instead of a source of livelihood. The government owns 24%, municipalities two percent and forest industries nine percent of the forest land (Kaila and Ihalainen, 2014).

Forest industries consume annually approximately 69 million cubic meters of roundwood, of which approximately 60% comes from non-industrial private forests equalling 80% of the domestic roundwood procurement (Peltola, 2014). Forest products exports comprise one fifth of the total exported goods in Finland (Kaila, 2014). Forest sector's share of the GDP has declined from around ten percent in 1975 to four percent in 2012 (Uotila and Vatanen, 2013), but with 160,000 employees it is still an important employer, especially in rural areas. Therefore, the representatives of forest owners and forest industry are key players in Finnish forest politics. Forest policy is guided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in cooperation with its subordinated organisations Finnish Forest Centre and Forest Development Centre TAPIO. [TAPIO started as an in-house consulting company from the beginning of 2015.]

The influence of coalitions is important driving force in policy change. This is particularly acknowledged by Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) which is a widely adopted theory to analyse policy changes (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). According to ACF changes in socio-economic conditions, public opinion, and impacts from other subsystems can induce policy change. Within a policy subsystem, policy change results from the interaction among different actors who form advocacy coalitions and influence policies. ACF offers a fruitful theoretical framework to analyse policy change and subsystem dynamics by identifying and analysing these coalitions. ACF has been tested to be applicable for analysing natural resource policy in developed countries (Sotirov and Memmler, 2012).

This study aims at shedding light to the diverse values within the forest sector in a developed economy where forest resources have historically been of crucial importance for national economy and development as well as rural livelihoods. It especially focuses on the divergence of values and collaboration among actors in efforts to influence the outcome of an important forest policy process. Understanding forest sector coalitions and the dynamics among and between them is important for efforts to move towards green economy and developing bioeconomy where forests and forestry have a central role.

This study applies ACF theory in the Finnish context by analysing the revision of the Forest Act, which is the most important law concerning forestry. Following the theory, the study identifies and describes the belief structures and coordination of advocacy coalitions in the Finnish

forest sector by including the whole catalogue of beliefs suggested by Sabatier and Weible (2007, Appendix A). According to our judgement, this kind of comprehensive analysis of beliefs is unique in ACF literature (see Matti and Sandström, 2011).

2. Theoretical approach

Many theoretical frameworks have been developed to address policy change. The most prominent ones include the Multiple Streams Framework (Kingdon, 1984), Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; True et al., 2007), the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sabatier and Weible, 2007) and the Institutional Analysis and Development (Kiser and Ostrom, 1982; Ostrom, 2007).

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1988, 1993) was developed for analysing policy change over periods of a decade. The main unit of analysis in the framework is a policy subsystem (Fig. 1), which has a substantive (e.g. forest policy) and a territorial (e.g. Finland) dimension and consists of public and private actors concerned about that field of policy (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

The different actors within a policy subsystem form advocacy coalitions with other actors who share the same set of policy core beliefs and with whom they engage in a non-trivial degree of collaboration over time (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The belief system of each actor is considered to have a hierarchical tri-partite structure (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). *Deep core beliefs* provide the basic normative rules that guide the action of an actor. Those involve very general normative and ontological assumptions about human nature, the relative priority of fundamental values such as liberty and equality (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The traditional left-right scales operate at the deep core level. Deep core beliefs are largely the product of childhood socialisation and, thus, very difficult to change (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

Policy core beliefs lie in the next level of the hierarchy. These are applications of deep core beliefs in a specific area of policy, e.g. forest policy (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). Policy core beliefs are the 'stickiest glue' that binds the actors of a coalition together (Sabatier, 1998). They provide the vision guiding strategic behaviour of coalitions, and help unite allies and divide opponents (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).

It is generally assumed that actors in a subsystem are aware of their positions and relationships with respect to other actors. The defining characteristics of policy core beliefs relate to their scope and topic, including the priority of different policy-related values, whose welfare counts, the relative seriousness and causes of policy problems, the relative authority of governments and markets, and the proper roles of the general public, elected officials, civil servants and experts (Sabatier, 1998). The policy core beliefs are also very difficult to change, because they deal with fundamental policy choices (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The advocacy coalitions are identified by analysing the policy core beliefs and coordinated activities of the actors in a sub-system. According to Sabatier and Weible (2007) operationalising two or three of the policy core beliefs is sufficient in order to identify at least two coalitions.

Secondary aspects (or secondary beliefs) are narrower in scope than policy core beliefs. Preferences related to specific instruments or proposals dealing with only a substantive or a territorial dimension of a subsystem are examples of secondary beliefs (Sabatier and Weible, 2007). The secondary aspects are assumed to be more easily adjusted in light of new data, experience, or changing strategic considerations (Sabatier, 1998). It is hypothesised in the ACF, that '*actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues pertaining to the policy core, although less so on secondary aspects*', and that '*an actor (or coalition) will give up secondary aspects of his (its) belief system before acknowledging weaknesses in the policy core*' (Sabatier and Weible, 2007, p. 220). Thus, identifying issues that divide opinions of the coalition members, or issues that have differing significance for different actors

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