



Improving communication among stakeholders through ex-post transactional analysis – case study on Romanian forestry

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ABSTRACT

One of the most visible components of the Forestry Development Project, carried out between 2003 and 2009 by the World Bank and Romanian Government was “PR support, Awareness Campaign and Development of PR products”, meant to improve the communication between all stakeholders involved in sustainable forest management. The awareness campaign mainly consisted of nine meetings with the forest owners and nine workshops with all stakeholders, i.e. representatives of the forest inspectorates, county headquarters of the national forest administration, mass media, forest landowners, forest managers, logging companies and local authorities, including police and gendarmerie. The discussions, facilitated in each meeting by the three authors, were recorded and the minutes produced there have been further used for diagnosing the main interaction bottlenecks occurred between stakeholders. These discussions have been examined through the transactional analysis method in order to find out the main communication problems needed to addresses at national, regional and local level by the representatives of the public authorities in charge with implementing and supervising the forest policy. The main results of this analysis consist of a list of problems supposed to generate conflicts of various kinds (legal, technical, managerial and communicational) in Romanian forestry. The study has also revealed some important and frequent pitfalls that jeopardize the communication between prevailing stakeholders. Explaining them and their root causes could be a very useful input for further PR training programs and for the academic curricula.

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1. Introduction

In general, the process of implementing environmental policies relies to a large extent on the stakeholders' awareness (Myers, 1996; Withrow-Robinson et al., 2002; Pinto-Correia et al., 2006; Fernandez-Gimenez et al., 2008); in particular, a successful forest policy depends not only on how responsible people are but also on how the stakeholders effectively communicate. A successful communication also depends on the extent to which different people figure out the risk of undertaking or not a certain course of actions, and these different perceptions are brought by different degrees of knowledge.

More recently it has been admitted that the communication between the European forest sector and other stakeholders is still difficult and a clear path towards a better inter-sectoral communication is still lacking (Hogl, 2007; Janse, 2007). These difficulties are brought about by the fact that any decision referring to forests and forestry encompasses large areas, long time horizon and multiple stakeholders (Kangas and Kangas, 2004), and implies also a great deal

of knowledge and information from different sources (Kennedy et al., 2003). Integrating these pieces of knowledge into the traditional forest management is an imperative (Krumland and Krott, 2004; Oesten and von Detten, 2008) as the forest management plan is still the main tool of communication (Otsyina, 2002; Larsen and Nielsen, 2007). However, formal participation in outlining the management plan does not guarantee a real influence upon the quality of communication but the competence and attitude of key actors may be of great importance. The quality of communication is also highly influenced by the distribution of power and conflicts of interests (Aasetre, 2006) or the systems of landscape classification, all these factors embedding locally specific values (Pinto-Correia et al., 2006).

Both issues, the distribution of power and conflicts of interests are interconnected with the concept of discourse, meant by sociologists as “a coherent set of more or less coherent understandings that shape the boundaries of thought, and thus of action” (Foucault, 2002). Discourse can also be seen as a particular way of using language and other symbolic forms able to shape relations (Leskinen, 2004). Usually the stakeholders who are responsible with keeping people better informed are leaned to emphasize some aspects and overlook other issues just for being in line with the common opinion, which is shaped to a great extent by indirect perception of most different communication channels

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(Scholz and Suda, 1998). However, the role of face-to-face or peer-to-peer communication cannot be neglected, as long as communication barriers still exist due to distrust or limited comprehension (Hujala and Tikkanen, 2008; Janse, 2007).

The Romanian forests and foresters were analyzed in some sociological studies focused on the local conflicts brought about by the forest restitution process (Dorondel, 2009; Sikor et al., 2009), on the social dimension of forestry and forest-related business in rural areas (Vasile, 2007), the peculiarities of traditional community forests in Romania, (Mantescu and Vasile, 2009), the relationship between local identity and forest ownership (Mantescu, 2009) or the systems of values altered or strengthened by the restitution process (Lawrence and Szabo, 2005; Nichiforel and Schanz, 2009; Sandulescu et al., 2007).

Between the methods meant to improve communication could be the transactional analysis (TA), although only a few studies actually aimed such a goal. The method was used in tourism in order to get a better interaction between employees and clients (Wachtel, 1980), in improving the relationships occurred in supply chain networks (Dani et al., 2004), in analyzing the discourse of workers facing organizational changes (deZanet et al., 2004) or in improving the communication skills of people employed in pharmaceutical activities (Lawrence, 2007). A pure theoretical perspective on the interaction between biological behavioral systems and their environment was also based on TA (Germana, 1996).

This paper aims at identifying through TA the main causes why the communication in Romanian forestry is either difficult or inefficient. The study the article is based on also has provided some clues about the linkages between the communication bottlenecks and five types of important problems to be solved. Some key stakeholders of Romanian forestry are also presented, along with some relevant structures and the threats these structures have to cope with. Since this is practically the first application of TA in exploring the communication problems occurred in forestry, a short presentation of the core theory of TA is embedded into the methodology section; the fourth section presents the results, the fifth one some discussions while some conclusions are drawn in the last section.

2. A snapshot on Romanian forestry and potential sources for communication pitfalls

The only significant change brought out in Romanian forestry in the last two decades is the ownership pattern (Fig. 1). After the collapse of the communist regime the forests have been restituted to the families

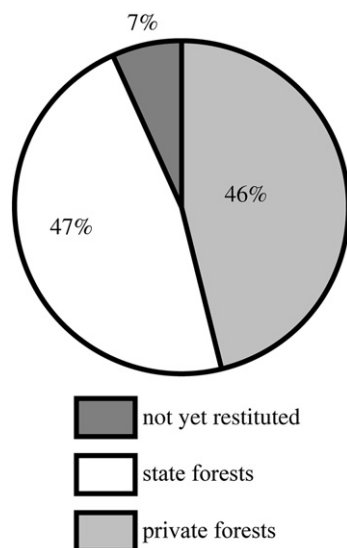


Fig. 1. The ownership structure of Romanian forests (by December, 2009, National Forest Administration annual report).

and communities who had owned them before 1948, the year when all forests were nationalized by the communist regime. The restitution process took a very long time due to the three successive and complementary laws of ownership restoration; the first one was issued in 1991 and the last one in 2005 (Strimbu et al., 2005); the restoration process itself is still ongoing, as suggested in Fig. 1. The stakeholders involved into the restitution process are the forestland owners and often their associations (or nowadays legal successors), forest administrator at the date (National Forest Administration – NFA), forest authority (Ministry of Agriculture represented by the regional offices, the Territorial Inspectorates for Forest Regime and Hunting (ITRSV¹), local and county public administration representatives.

There are about 1 million individual owning patches of forest from 0.01 ha and tens of hectares, the state being the largest forest owner. These individual forest owners are facing an over-prescriptive legislation and they also lack the basic knowledge about forest management and forestry.

NFA is the largest forest administrator in Romania (about 50% of the forest land in Romania, see Fig. 1), and manages not only the state forest but also some private forestland; it is organized as a national company and nowadays is facing severe financial difficulties since the managed forest area has been reduced more than the total number of employees.

The ITRSV network (Fig. 2) was created in 2005 to support the public authority for law enforcement, monitoring and extension services for the whole forestry sector.

The private forest administrators are also important stakeholders. They manage forests owned by individuals, municipalities and associations, and their structures (Private Forest Districts, further referred as PFD) have kept up with the restitution process in order to get a better control on the overheads.² The whole restitution process, which effectively lasted more than 15 years, has been deterred in various ways, even stopped for some years, for different reasons, such as the fear of having the forests destroyed by the new private owners, the inability of local authorities to deal with the whole process of ownership restoration, lack of appropriate papers to document the ownership before the forest nationalization. Another important aspect worth being highlighted in this context is the political interference: none of the political parties empowered after the five democratic elections was seriously interested in reorganizing the NFA³ or simplifying the legislation referring to forests and forest management. Therefore the whole system is not been able to pursue any forest policy the public authority would have conceived.

3. Research method

3.1. Basic concepts of transaction analysis

Transactional analysis (TA) is both an instrument for social psychology and a method to improve communication; it allows to analyze how we have developed and treated ourselves, how we relate and communicate with others. Eric Berne coined it by the end of '50s and transformed it into a new philosophy of social and business networking (Berne, 1961, 1966). Conceptually the TA relies on the three states in which the 'ego' interacts with the rest of the world; these states are responsible for the ways one thinks, feels and behaves and they are called Child, Adult, and Parent.

The Parent state (further referred as P) is defined by set of feelings, ideas and beliefs the child has copied from her/his predecessors or caretakers; it operates with rules, concepts, prejudgments, norms and

¹ ITRSV is the Romanian abbreviation for "Inspectorate Teritoriale de Regim Silvic si Vanatoare".

² Wherever it is possible, the forest owners prefer to make their own forest district, which seems to be the cost-effective solution in many cases. The alternative option is to make an administration contract with the local NFA forest district.

³ Before 2005 the NFA managed about 70% of the Romanian forests and each ruling party extensively used its network for campaigning in parliamentary elections.

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