



Paradoxes of participation: The logic of professionalization in participatory forestry[☆]



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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 10 August 2015

Keywords:

Participation
Forest management
Science
Power
Elite capture

ABSTRACT

Processes of participatory forestry reform in the Global South in recent decades present us with a paradox. While ostensibly aimed at promoting participation by forest adjacent communities, these reforms more often appear to sustain domination by forest administrations or private enterprises and have increasingly been associated with inequitable social outcomes. Part of the explanation for this must be sought in the professionalization promoted by these reforms in the sense of scientific management approaches and structured and detailed systems of information gathering, dissemination and planning. Professionalization has its roots in the historical development of forestry bureaucracies with a basis in principles of scientific forestry that, more recently, has come to resonate with logics of development and neoliberalism. Professionalization emerges in participatory reform as technically and procedurally demanding framings that inhibit implementation, downplay politics and promote inequality. The contributions to this special issue illustrate empirical pathways to unpack and question the framing of participatory forestry as professionalization by pointing to its anti-democratic and social consequences and questioning its relevance and usefulness to actual forest management practice.

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1. Introduction

Processes of participatory forestry reform in the Global South in recent decades present us with a paradox. Ostensibly, these reforms seek to promote participation by forest adjacent communities in forest management through devolution of management rights with a view to promote sustainable forest management and equitable improvements in local livelihoods and development opportunities. Yet, more often they appear to sustain the domination of decision-making concerning forests by government officials or private enterprises (Ribot et al., 2006). Further, when rights are actually devolved, the outcomes tend to fall short of expectations. Whereas reforms appear to bring about improvements in forest management and conservation in many instances (Bowler et al., 2012; Porter-Bolland et al., 2012), the expected equitable livelihood improvements for forest adjacent communities have failed to materialize, and instead the evidence indicates a pattern of increased hardships for the poorest and capture of the, often limited, benefits by local elites (Balooni et al., 2010; Lund and Saito-Jensen, 2013; Persha and Andersson, 2014).

Part of the explanation for why we observe this paradox of participatory forestry reforms is, I argue, that they end up promoting professionalization, i.e. a reliance on scientific management approaches and structured and detailed systems of information gathering, dissemination and planning. This, in turn, implies obstacles for implementation and the

privileging of certain forms of knowledge that are typically held by forestry professionals and social elites in forest adjacent communities. The five contributions to this special issue illustrate various elements of professionalization in participatory reform processes and their social consequences and examine the relevance and usefulness of these elements to actual forest management practices. Thus, this special issue presents a conceptualization of participatory forestry that allows us to see through the veil of 'participation' and illustrates empirical pathways to unpack and question the actual practices engendered by participatory forestry reforms.

2. Participatory forestry

Participatory forestry refers to forest governance approaches that involve people living in and around forests in their management. Thus, it includes the many management regimes entitled decentralized forest management, participatory forest management, joint forest management, community-based forest management, indigenous forestry, and social forestry found around the world that show great variation in the sharing of rights and responsibilities between different levels of government and rural communities. In their contemporary form, these approaches emerged in 1970s and gained ground to become a standard model for forest conservation and management in the Global South by the 1990s.

Participatory forestry approaches are part of the participatory, sometimes populist, turn in international development emphasizing both instrumental and moral grounds for the promotion of bottom-up approaches to development (Chambers, 1983; Cernea, 1985). From an instrumental point of view, and building on decentralization and

[☆] I owe this title to Frances Cleaver (1999).
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participation theory, participatory forestry approaches have been promoted by many academics and the international donor community as a solution to the challenge of mediating concerns for ecological integrity and forest resource sustainability with concerns for peoples' forest-based livelihoods and their rights to be involved in decision making on forests (Ostrom, 1990; Ribot, 2004). Involving forest adjacent communities in forest governance and management by giving them official rights to decision making, and entitling them to benefits from forest uses, has been forecast as 'win-win' scenarios of environmentally sound management that supports the livelihoods and development aspirations of such communities. The approaches have been legislated and implemented, notably by governments of developing countries, with advisory and financial support from donors and have been dubbed social forestry, joint forest management, community-based forest management, and decentralized forest management, among others. A recent global assessment found that, in one way or another, forest adjacent communities are officially involved in the management of approximately 30% of the forests in low and middle income countries, and that this share is increasing (RRI, 2013).

Despite the theoretically anticipated promises and apparent widespread uptake, the outcomes of participatory forestry reforms around the world are contested. While a large body of studies overwhelmingly finds that such approaches serve to conserve forests (Bowler et al., 2012; Porter-Bolland et al., 2012), evidence on the social outcomes of participatory forestry indicates that the approach falls short of its promises of equitably distributed social and economic benefits to forest adjacent communities (Ribot et al., 2010; Roe et al., 2009; Lund and Saito-Jensen, 2013; Maryudi et al., 2012). At a more fundamental level, critics have argued that the reason for the disappointing outcomes of participatory forestry must be sought in the way it is implemented in practice that defies its underlying premises. Some have shown that, in place of devolved decision making over forests to forest adjacent communities, participatory forestry manifests as continued domination of decision making by government officials, private enterprises or local elites (e.g. Ribot et al., 2010; Roe et al., 2009; Shackleton et al., 2002).

The explanations for these paradoxes in the practice and outcomes of participatory forestry emphasize that the approaches are resisted by the very governments that appear to promote them, because they from inception were promoted for other reasons than to induce environmentally sound management that supports the livelihoods and development aspirations of forest adjacent communities. Ribot et al. (2006), for instance, argue that participatory forestry reforms have been promoted due to a combination of donor pressure and national governments seeking to promote industrialization or curb secessionist movements and rival political leaders at sub-national levels. They link these underlying rationales to the observations of partial and hesitant devolution processes that have not allowed forest adjacent communities a say over forests.

In addition to explanations that question whether participatory forestry reforms are genuinely supported by the governments that legislate them, recent studies have emphasized that part of the explanation for the disappointing outcomes of participatory forestry might be found in its framing. These studies illustrate that the framing of participatory forestry processes emphasize bureaucratic management procedures and standardized forest inventories aiming at a sustained yield of forest products, mainly timber. This approach to conceptualizing, measuring and managing forests derives from a forestry tradition dating back to the 18th century Europe that remains the standard for how forest administrations view and manage forests today (Scott, 1998; Vandergeest and Peluso, 2006a,b). A few studies link this framing of forest management to the disappointing outcomes of participatory forestry by, for instance, showing how participatory forestry reforms are obstructed by requirements for technically demanding and costly management plans (Ribot and Larson, 2007). Others have argued that the framing of participation as professionalization may serve to marginalize or even exclude other forms of place- and experience-based forms of knowledge, and, in turn, exclude the poorer and less educated from decision making on

community forestry matters (Nightingale, 2005). Further, Kumar (2002) showed how the focus on timber in the management planning system in joint forest management in India over time led to forests that no longer yielded the multiple products and services demanded by the poorer segments of the communities. Finally, Krott et al., 2014 give expertise a prominent role in their actor-centered power approach to analyze decentralized forestry approaches. They suggest that professional foresters' superior expertise allows them to exercise power in decision-making processes over forests by making truth claims that lay people cannot easily verify, something they dub 'dominant information'.

The studies have linked these observations of a techno-scientific framing of participatory forestry to various underlying logics. Some have pointed to the technical framing as a convenient way to retain the status quo in the existing political economy of forest exploitation (Ribot and Larson, 2007). Others have hinted at the existence of techno-bureaucratic codes in forest bureaucracies that emphasize scientific forestry, i.e. to ongoing processes of socialization and, thereby subjectivity formation, among forestry professionals emphasizing scientific forestry as the way of conceptualizing and managing forests (Nightingale and Ojha, 2013).

This leads to new paradoxes of participatory forestry. The initial paradox is that participatory forestry reforms broadly appear not to support participatory practices and equitably distributed livelihoods improvements for forest adjacent communities, whereas forest conservation goals appear to be broadly met. As indicated above, part of the explanation for this paradox may lie in a second order paradox: that participatory forestry reforms are not meant to lead to participation but are promoted for other, instrumental reasons. Yet, another paradox that holds explanatory power in relation to understanding the initial paradox is that participatory forestry reforms may end up promoting professionalization of forest management, i.e. a reliance on principles of scientific forestry and bureaucratic procedures in implementation, in ways that are at odds with participatory ideals. In the following, I unfold the logic of professionalization and discuss possible reasons for why participatory forestry is framed thus.

3. Professionalization

In this context, professionalization is the notion that natural resources must be managed rationally and effectively. That we need professional experts and systems of information gathering, dissemination and planning to be able to manage natural resources. The logic of professionalization arose in 18th century Central Europe with the establishment of State bureaucracies and a scientific approach to forestry (Scott, 1998; Vandergeest and Peluso, 2006a,b). This was part of a broader modern State formation process in Central Europe. The purpose of professionalization of forestry was to create a basis for fiscal forestry, for rulers to know their forest resource and manage it efficiently for purposes of timber production and revenue collection. The first step was the development of techniques to measure and calculate sustained yields from forests. This demanded the elaboration of forest growth models to yield predictions about how trees would respond to different management options. The growth models should, in principle, build on detailed knowledge of the ecology of the individual tree species, including their regeneration in response to different soil, moisture and light conditions. This would allow forest managers to control and predict the development of forests to yield the desired tree species in the appropriate sizes. The second step was then the reshaping of forests into more simplified ecosystems through clear-cutting and re-planting of single-species forests (monocultures) that could be managed in accordance with the principles of scientific forestry without having detailed knowledge of the ecology and interactions of multiple species. This happened on a large scale in Central Europe (Scott, 1998).

Through colonialism the principles of scientific forestry traveled far and wide and were adapted to the widely differing contexts encountered by colonial foresters (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2006a,b). In the

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