



Adapting to the gender order: Voluntary conservation by forest owners in Finland



Annikka Vainio^{a,*}, Riikka Paloniemi^b

^a Department of Social Research, University of Helsinki, Finland

^b Environmental Policy Centre, Finnish Environmental Institute (SYKE), Helsinki, Finland

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ABSTRACT

In this article we explore the hidden gender order of the biodiversity policy and, in particular, the social and societal positions offered to male and female forest owners in voluntary conservation. Two studies were conducted in the region where the National Biodiversity Program for Southern Finland ("METSO") has been implemented. Study 1 focused on forest owners' discursive practices that construct different actor positions to female and male forest owners; 27 interviews with forest owners were analyzed. Three discourses – "conservation threatens forestry," "forestry threatens conservation," and "good forestry is conservation" – were identified. Forest owners typically described themselves as "loggers" who were explicitly described as masculine. This was paired with the feminine position of "bystander." The other two positions found, "protectors" and "political agents", by contrast, were discussed as non-gendered positions. In Study 2 we examined quantitatively how individual forest owners' nature conservation preferences and willingness to conserve forests is mediated by gender. The responses of 965 owners were analyzed with structural equation modeling. The endorsement of nature conservation preferences was found to increase willingness to conserve forests only among male owners. The results illustrate how individual forest owners adapt their nature conservation preferences to forestry's masculine socio-cultural context.

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Introduction

Conservation of privately owned lands is not only a biodiversity issue, but also a social one. In Finland previous nature conservation programs have failed to recognize forest owners as important environmental agents in conservation. The tension between forest owners and conservationists has increased the pressure to develop new conservation policies that incorporate the perceptions of forest owners. The National Biodiversity Program for Southern Finland ("METSO"), a conservation program for state and privately owned lands was launched by the Finnish government in 2002. It was piloted during the years 2002–2007 before being fully implemented in 2008 (Government of Finland, 2002, 2008). The program is set to continue through the year 2016. The program emphasized voluntariness and the option of making temporary contracts between forest owners and the government's forestry or environmental authorities. Most importantly, METSO is based on the recognition that a multiplicity of conservation actions can be taken on private forest lands and, further, that the actions of forest owners are even necessary for some forms of biodiversity. For example,

semi-natural habitats that have been grazed for decades are among the most endangered habitats in the country; they do not survive without human action (Kuussaari et al., 2007; Pöyry et al., 2004). As a result of METSO program, forest owners' willingness to engage in voluntary conservation has increased (Paloniemi and Varho, 2009).

However, the METSO conservation program has not succeeded in recruiting female forest owners at the same rate as male owners (Paloniemi et al., 2010; Borg and Paloniemi, 2012). This seems to be a paradox because traditionally women have expressed stronger conservation attitudes and environmental concerns than men (e.g. Blocker and Eckberg, 1997; Tindall et al., 2003). In general, gender has remained a blind spot in the development of environmental policies, which suggests that women forest owners are not yet recognized as full environmental agents having potentially different preferences from male forest owners. Feminist environmental research has demonstrated that the economic use of forests coincides with hegemonic masculinity and that forest ownership represents a masculine sphere of action (Brandth and Haugen, 2000a,b; Seager, 1993). However, feminist researchers have emphasized that both men and women can either support or oppose this masculine culture (McGregor, 2006).

Even though private landowners may conserve nature by setting aside certain sites or managing other sites in an environmentally conscious manner, official conservation efforts are needed for

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 9 19124886.

E-mail address: annukka.vainio@helsinki.fi (A. Vainio).

systematic conservation planning and especially for combining biological conservation knowledge with lay knowledge. However, the relationship between private landowners and conservation officials is not straightforward (Paloniemi and Vainio, 2011). In this article we suggest that one important reason for forest owners' reluctance to engage in cooperative conservation programs has resulted from the discourse that emphasizes the difference and incompatibility between forest owners' emphasis of the economic use of forests and the expectations of nature conservation. We base this suggestion on previous studies, which have shown that in Finland, especially during last decades, the environmental debate has been polarized along economic and nature conservation lines (Rantala and Primmer, 2003; Sabatier, 1998; Vainio and Paloniemi, 2012). In addition, we suggest that even if in principle women forest owners might be potential conservationists, the masculine culture of forestry encourages men's participation and does not recognize women as active forest owners; consequently, official efforts result in limiting women's participation in conservation activities.

In this article we explore the gender order of biodiversity conservation in the Finnish forest sector. We focus on both the conservation preferences of forest owners and on the discursive practices that construct, maintain and challenge the current state of the art. This question is relevant for understanding the challenges faced by current biodiversity policies to involve private forest owners in voluntary conservation and, in particular, for understanding why only a limited number of female forest owners have participated in the METSO biodiversity program.

More specifically, we focus on the research question how forest owners construct the continuum of economic forestry and biodiversity conservation as gendered activities and how individual forest owners, both women and men, break this gendered hegemony in their conservation attitudes. We examine how the relationship between forestry and conservation is discursively constructed and whether individuals align themselves and other actors based on their gender within these discourses.

We begin by reviewing the research on gender in the context of forestry and biodiversity conservation before turning to our empirical analyses and their findings.

Private forest owners, biodiversity policy and gender

Around 20 per cent of Finns are forest owners. The structure of small-scale private forest owners is changing: a growing number of forest owners live in the cities, are more highly educated than before and do not get their living directly from farming and/or forestry as they used to do by tradition (Karppinen and Ahlberg, 2010). Moreover, nearly a quarter of the Finnish forest owners are women, and their number is continuously increasing (Hänninen et al., 2011). It has been suggested that all these structural changes affect private forest owners' relationship with nature as well as forestry. Previously timber and wood were important sources of income for many forest owners, but nowadays many forest owners, in particular those who are not economically dependent on their forests, focus also on environmentalist as well as recreationist objectives (Karppinen and Ahlberg, 2010; Hallikainen et al., 2010). It has also been argued that many forest owners are multi-objective owners who value equally both monetary benefits as well as environmental conservation (Karppinen, 1998, 2000).

Official natural resource management in Finland emphasizes equally the ecological and the social aspects of sustainability (Finnish Forest Act, 1996; Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2001). Especially during 1990s, biodiversity conservation was integrated to conventional forest management through redefining the Forest Act (1996) and by providing planning services for forest owners (Primmer and Karppinen, 2010). The social

sustainability criterion means that people should be treated equally, and everyone should have the opportunity to participate. However, despite the official efforts of the mainstream biodiversity conservation, forestry and forestry-related activities are still run by men. In the rural areas of Finland women are often considered as farmers' wives, or daughter-in-laws (Silvasti, 2003), as they are in other countries where the forest industry is nationally important, such as Norway (Brandth and Haugen, 2000a,b) and Canada (Reed, 2003a,b). It has been suggested that forestry and forest policy are gendered spheres, limiting women's involvement and undermining their environmental agency while privileging men's contributions (Brandth and Haugen, 2000a,b; Reed, 2003a,b; Varghese and Reed, 2012).

Whereas forestry has been depicted as a typically masculine activity, environmental protection has often been associated with women (Glazebrook, 2002). Women typically express greater environmental concern than men (Blocker and Eckberg, 1997; Bord and O'Connor, 1997; Davidson and Freudenburg, 1996; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Mohai, 1997; Tindall et al., 2003); women also report greater participation in pro-environmental behavior (Zelezny et al., 2000). Feminist research in particular has presented an image of active environmentalist women (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Seager, 1993).

Previous research conducted in Sweden and Finland has reported that women forest owners are more conservation-oriented than men, who tend to emphasize the economic use of forests (Hiedanpää, 2002; Leskinen et al., 2004; Uliczka et al., 2004). However, in the context of forestry, women have not mobilized their pro-environmental perspectives as expected (Varghese and Reed, 2012). For example in Finland, METSO has not recruited female owners at the same rate as male owners (Paloniemi et al., 2010; Borg and Paloniemi, 2012). It has been suggested that this discrepancy reflects the masculine gender order, which limits women's opportunities and participation. Even larger societal trends emphasizing gender equality have not affected forest ownership at the same rate: for example in Finnish rural areas, land is still typically transferred from father to son (Silvasti, 2003). According to Reed (2003a,b), in Canada where most forests are publicly owned, females working in forestry and/or living in forestry communities supported and strengthened the gender division by downplaying their own agency and devoting themselves to their spouses.

Previous studies applying a discursive approach in rural contexts have shown how dominant discourses marginalize women and tend to describe them primarily as spouses and housewives (Brandth and Haugen, 2000b; Liepins, 1996; Walter and Wilson, 1996). Brandth and Haugen (2000a) applied discourse analysis to material in Norwegian forestry magazines and identified Norwegian forest management as a hegemonically masculine space where gender was never made a topic: gender was effectively invisible. In these magazines, female forest owners were described as "silent owners" because they have been invisible in most areas of forestry.

Empirical focus of the study

To explore the gender order of biodiversity conservation in the Finnish forest sector and reasons explaining why female forest owners participate in voluntary forest conservation less than expected, we analyzed both the qualitative and the quantitative data. Study 1 focused on discourses in the interviews with forest owners, describing the relationship among forestry, conservation and gender. Study 2 generalized these findings by examining the effect of owners' conservation preferences on their willingness to engage in voluntary conservation, with special attention given to possible gender differences.

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