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The involvement of stakeholders in a forest policy reform process: Democracy promotion and power redistribution *(reviewed paper)*

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Abstract: Oft wird Mitwirkung als Werkzeug präsentiert, um Demokratie zu fördern, aber gleichzeitig führt dies zu einer Neudefinierung der Angelegenheiten, Entscheidungen und ebenso zu einer Neuverteilung von Macht unter den Interessenvertretern. Gestützt auf empirische Beweise, die auf Erfahrungen mit der forstpolitischen Reform in Kirgistan (eine der früheren zentralasiatischen Sowjetrepubliken) und auf der Analyse grundlegender theoretischer Systeme von Mitwirkung beruhen, wird die Frage nach der Macht in Bezug auf Entscheidungs- und Mitwirkungsprozesse und in der Beeinflussung der Stakeholder-Gruppen gestellt.

Abstract: Participation is often presented as a tool to promote democracy, but it also leads to the redefinition of issues, decisions as well as to power redistribution among stakeholders. Based on empirical evidence drawn from the forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan (a former constituent republic of the Soviet Union) and from an analysis of basic theoretical frameworks for participation, the paper treats the question of power in relation to decision-making and participatory processes as well as the impact that participation has on the empowerment of some groups of stakeholders.

Public involvement in a policy process is a constitutive element of democracy in particular and a means of empowering citizens and the public in general, but it may be also used as a tool for organising power re-distribution or re-enforcing existing power structures.

Participation and forest policy

Why raise the question of participation and democracy in a forest policy process?

In conventional forest management approaches, the power of deciding is not questioned as such, as it is mainly restricted to technical expertise. This type of framework is generally referred to as rationalist technocratic decision-making that originates at the top of the hierarchical administrative structure. Neither external input nor exchanges of opinion or the setting of priorities are necessarily included into such a process. Decisions taken in this way are based on the rationalist analysis of objectives and the means necessary for their achievement, and lead from the best solution of a single problem to the definition of another one. This framework leaves no space for either deliberation or negotiation, while participation, if existent, is limited to a one-way information flow from «the other actors and stakeholders» to the «deciders».

Set against this philosophy, in the international debate on sustainable forest management governments have pledged to work towards broader public participation in decision-making, giving more importance to participation and deliberation in the forest policy processes. The need to promote economically viable, socially acceptable and ecologically sound forest practices, has extended the former understanding of forestry from sustainable yield harvesting towards sustainable management of multiple goods and services for the benefit of various stakeholders. The requirement of including environmental, economic and social aspects in forest management raises the need for new decision-making procedures, based on democratic participatory style of interactions. On the one hand, public participation is inevitable, because forest expert knowledge alone and pure economic or ecological approaches to forest management no longer suffice. On the other, the global trend of democratic societies

to increase public involvement in decision-making processes should promote social sustainability. Participation has therefore become a major factor in the dominant discourse on sustainable development and indicates that «administrators and experts might arrive at the public interest by allowing the «public» to participate in environmental decision making» (TABBUH 2004).

For many years prior to the necessity of participation in forest policy processes, public involvement in policy decisions and debates about empowerment, legitimacy and social/political learning was in the hands of the social and political sciences. In these debates, participation is usually presented as a constitutive element of and an essential requirement for democracy. Democracy is assimilated with the possibility given to citizens for free deliberation and involvement in policy decision-making at various levels, thus creating conditions for learning, empowerment and raising citizens' awareness of their responsibility while giving legitimacy to decisions (FISHKIN 1991; LEVINE 2002; ROBERTS 2004). An effective stakeholder participation in policy decisions gives credibility, saliency and legitimacy to such decisions. It is linked to the sovereignty, political equity, and the empowerment of citizens and the definition of collective will (WEBLER & TULER 2002; ECKLEY 2001).

Different theories specify different types of democracies, with the use of different approaches and definitions. These differences depend on the ways in which the public has access to decision-making processes and the role it is accorded. These ways can be summed up and grouped as:

- Participation through representation: when elected representatives act in the interests of the groups or parties who have voted for them. In fact, these representatives have enough authority to act on their own initiative, depending on the changing circumstances.
- Participation through public deliberation: a social inquiry process, that occurs when the actors self-consciously organise themselves in deliberation as a learning community. The aims of this process are to establish common meanings and understanding through discourse, and to generate new options, choices, understandings and desired consequences (DRYZEK 1990, 1993; FORESTER 1996). It is a *de facto* participation, based on spontaneous discussion among participants (DOVIE 2003).

From this point of view, the issue of democracy is relevant to the forest policy and sustainable forest management, as it can act as a guarantee for the social sustainability. ROBERTS (2004) summarises it in the following manner:

- A transparency in the decision-making process;
- Equal representation of the interests of various stakeholders;
- A clear definition of and agreement among all the participants about a general, or common interest, (as well as priorities, expected results, objectives);
- Willingness of the public to be involved in the process;
- Negotiation of the various interests as the basis for the process and a possibility of trade-off decisions among the perceived benefits of the various alternatives made by the involved stakeholders;
- A combination of individual preferences in a clear, easily understood manner so that the citizens would recognise how they have influenced the outcome.

Participation as viewed by forest policy scientists

The need to take social, ecological and economic factors in forest management into account has not only introduced public participation into forest policy processes but has also made it a subject of analysis for forest policy scientists. What is the difference between participation in general and participation in a forest policy process? From a functional or instrumental point of view, participation can be seen as an instrument, providing additional information to that of the technical knowledge of the experts while, at the same time, legitimising technical decisions. The role of participation is to improve the nature and quality of information considered by policy and decision-makers (SHANNON 2002).

From an ethical or normative point of view, participation is a democratic process for communicative decision-making based on various stakeholders' views.¹ An analysis of the literatures² leads to the conclusion that when participation is treated as a democratic process for communicative decision-making based on an interactive communicative system it can be considered as:

- a principle, which guarantees transparency of decisions and consensus building among the presented opposed positions and priorities (GLÜCK 1999; SHANNON 1999);
- a mechanism, which provides political (collaborative) learning and consciousness raising for all involved actors (APPELSTRAND 2002; BOON 2001; NORDIC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS 2002);
- a process of communicative action, which results in legitimacy of decisions and empowerment of the involved participants. This communicative action creates a shared understanding through public deliberation within a community of interpretation leading to mutually defined social goals and a common vision of desired outcomes (ARNSTEIN 1969; BUTTOUD 1999; SHANNON 2002).

The concept of participation does not have one simple interpretation. Moreover, when applied to the sphere of forest policy, it preserves all the complexity of definitions and approaches from the social/sociological/political sciences, while adding specific features of policies for the management of natural resources.

Depending on the theoretical frameworks, the stakeholders involved in the process and the types of resulting decisions, participation can also be defined as:

- Consultative planning or resource participation (BUTTOUD 1999), whereas the decisions are based on participation

through consultation, without either sharing the decision making power or an obligation to consider public opinion. This type of participation is also presented as a passive one, because the one-way flow of factual information comprises the main element.

- Representative participation (BOON 2001), collaborative planning, functional planning (BUTTOUD 1999; DOVIE 2003) these various definitions are related to a collective process for resolving conflicts and advancing shared visions on the decision under discussion. This type of participation is usually related to the involvement of selected groups of diverse stakeholders in relation to a limited number of selected issues.
- Auto-mobilisation (BUTTOUD 1999), deliberation (SHANNON 2003), community participation (JEANRENAUD 2001; FINGERSTICH 2003), refers to situations where forest departments and local user groups share products, responsibilities, control and decision-making authority. This is a de facto, or active participation, in which mobilised and active participants can contribute to decision-making process.

The involvement of various stakeholders in forest policy processes necessarily means the confrontation of various opposed interests (BUTTOUD 1999; BUTTOUD & YUNUSOVA 2003a, b) and thus makes it more likely that a legitimated decision in respect of a negotiated common good can arise out of this confrontation. As a result, participation in forest management and policy processes is usually a procedural result from economic, political and ethical needs that takes the various demands, requirements and interests expressed by different stakeholders into account. Participation as a process for the definition of forest policy not only opens up ways for various stakeholders' interests to be taken into account, but may also effect a change in the visions and positions of all participants.

In the present article, participation is considered from the ethical/normative point of view, as a democratic communicative process leading to a commonly negotiated decision taken with the involvement of various stakeholders.

From empowerment to power re-distribution

In the interest of social stability, public involvement in decision-making is considered by some authors as a possibility for the representation of under-represented interests through deliberation and communication, which may eventually lead to the political empowerment of the «have-nots» (ARNSTEIN 1969). In his «ladder of participation», Arnstein puts «citizen power» at the higher end and passes through «delegated power» to «citizen control», which he describes as a situation when the «have-not citizens» are able to negotiate with traditional power-holders and obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power. Thus the question of power is not alien to the participatory processes.

The empowerment could be interpreted as a transfer of power from one decision-making body to those who would be concerned by the impact from this decision or by its implementation. What exactly happens during a participatory decision-making process? Do all participants have equal capacities of empowerment? How will participants act in order to acquire

¹ Buttoud 2005, unpublished.

² Cf. the author's analysis entitled «Concept paper on public participation» within the EU research project on New Modes of Governance in Europe (GoFOR). www.boku.ac.at/GoFOR (October 6, 2006).

power? What kind of power are they looking for? What are the decisive factors for empowerment? Does the distribution of power flow only in the direction of the empowerment of the «initially not powerful»? What are the moving factors and interests for this distribution?

Before getting down to the reflections about empowerment in the course of participation, it is necessary to specify, what is meant by the concept of «power» in the framework of this paper.

Over the centuries, «power» has been a subject of theoretical discourse for political philosophers and, later on, policy scientists (CLEGG 1979; GAULD 1996; DAHL 1961; DE JOUVENEL 1993; WEBER 1980). For many, power is linked to human passions in the context of discussions on sovereignty, democracy and political rights. Power has been considered through the integrative dynamics of the society, through the will for domination, power of making choices and also through the decision-making paradigm, which seems to be more appropriate for the objectives of the present paper.

Addressed from the different approaches, the issues have several dimensions or «faces» (DAHL 1957; GAVENTA 1980; LUKES 1974; BARNETT & DUVAL 2005). Power is evenly distributed across society with each possessing the ability to influence the political process through involvement in various interest groups (DAHL 1961). At the same time, it represents the capacity to mobilise general resources in society for the attainment of social goals. From a social and historical description and in terms of categorical divisions of society, power is considered not as a fixed part of a social structure, but as a process, one aspect of an ongoing social relationship. In a democratic process, it may be held through a delegated authority. Power may be provided by expertise, knowledge, money, force, moral persuasion or by the social influence of tradition. Within this approach, democracy is characterised as a system of competing elites, (elite pluralism), who are seen as the main participants in decision-making processes: they have the power to make decisions and the power to keep issues off the political agenda. Relations of power focus on leaders and followers, where elite rule is inevitable. Even in democratic societies, elite groups dominate political decision-making processes, either because of the superior personal qualities of the leaders, like intelligence or education (BUCHANAN & TULLOCK 1962; HOFSTAAD 2002; ROBERTS 2004), or because of their superior organisational ability in the face of the disorganisation of other elite groups and the population at large.

These four dimensions of power can be summarised with the following questions: «Who, if anyone, is exercising the power?»; «What issues are taken off the agenda and by whom?»; «Whose objective interests are being harmed?» and «What kind of subject is being produced?» (Digeser 1992, as quoted by BARNETT & DUVAL 2005). These four central questions of power are echoed in the questions linked to participation.

Participation, from ideal to reality

As an element of a democratic process, participation in a forest policy aimed at sustainable forest management can be expected to promote consciousness raising and political learning. It is required for a consensus between the opposed interests and leads to legitimate decisions, empowerment and raises the involved stakeholders' awareness of their responsibility. These considerations necessarily lead to the questions: Who are the stakeholders involved? Or, more generally, who are the participants of the process? How do they start to participate and at which point of the process? What are the rea-

sons for their involvement? These questions may be developed on the basis of both theoretical explications from literature and practical experience.³

Who are the participants?

As potential participants we must consider all citizens and the population at large. A democratic deliberation, linked with empowerment, depends upon active citizens, willing to invest their time in political debate (SHANNON 2002). Nevertheless, many of the studies of participatory decision-making processes, as well as everyday practice, show that, in fact, the «public» may be passive and is anyway difficult to define. It is not individual citizens who participate, although selected stakeholders or organised groups have clear stakes for participating. As a result, participation in forest policy issues, as in any political process, will consciously and directly engage the people interested in (and affected by) the choices, as well as those whose actions, budgets and commitments are necessary to carry out the chosen courses of action (Reich 1985 in SHANNON 2002). It also means that all participants entering the process will arrive with the aim of promoting their own (group) interests.

If the principle of equal representation of all the interests is to be followed, how can the under-represented stakeholders be identified? How can the question of proportionality be settled in a forest policy process? Which stakeholders are integrated elements of the political system? From the structural functionalist point of view, a group influences the case proportionally to a number of people in the group (HOFSTAAD 2002). This means that more numerous and better-organised groups of stakeholders will have more chance to promote their interests, and thus, influence the decision. This link between representation of interests and access to decisions is especially important in the case of natural resources management. There are several reasons for this:

The fact that forest policy is linked with abstract and symbolic challenges, as well as to ethical values (for instance, environmental issues and ecological values of the forests) decreases the challenge of participation for (lay people) individuals. Another reason is that individuals, generally pre-occupied by the everyday priorities, have no time to invest into the process of deliberation, as they are convinced that their proper ideas will not necessarily be followed (TABBUSH 2004).

The study by A. Finger-Stich on the management of communal forests in the Alps in France and Switzerland provides us with a good example; FINGER-STICH (2003) shows that forests are often marginal to people's pre-occupations. They are usually more interested in their local forests or recreational activities. In order to facilitate their participation it is therefore necessary to take account of the territorial realities and focus on practice-oriented considerations in forest management related issues.

³ For the examples relating to France, material was used from a pre-assessment study implemented by the Laboratory of Forest Policy (ENGREF, France), within the framework of the EU research project on the new modes of governance in forestry (GoFOR). For the examples from Kyrgyzstan, experience was used from the forest policy reform (see also KOUPLJEVATSKAYA-YUNUSOVA 2004, 2005) and from the EU research project on the elaboration of integrated management plans in Juniper forests of South Kyrgyzstan (Jump, CHORFI 2004).

Some of the interested (concerned) actors may be not recognised as relevant participants (stakeholders) by the policy-makers and thus excluded from the process.

In southern Kyrgyzstan for instance, the forest services did not consider a particular NGO – which was involved in village development activities – as sufficiently important when it came to developing a forest management plan for the region. Or, in France, during the formulation phase in the NFP process, environmental NGOs were invited to policy discussions only if the discussed issues were related to biodiversity, but not to the debates on forest production, timber harvesting and wood chain strategies.

Some actors or stakeholders who may have objective interests are not aware of that and thus stay away from the process.

An analysis of partnership relations between the forest communes and the State Forest Agency (ONF) in France shows that elected mayors do not often interfere in forest management issues, either because they place great trust in the forest service («foresters are well educated specialists, paid for their services, therefore they are totally responsible for all what is linked to forest management»), or they do not consider the forest to be an important issue for their communes. In France, only about 40% of forestry communes participates in the discussions on forest policy issues via their national association. Another example comes from the forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan, where, at the initial stages (analysis and policy formulation), environmental NGOs and representatives of the village councils were practically absent – basically for the same reasons as in France; it was only in the later stages (after the policy evaluation) that the challenge for participation in forest policy became clear to them too, and they started to participate actively in the process (KOUPLÉVATSKAYA-YUNUSOVA 2005).

The resources available for different stakeholders may not be equivalent to their interests or legitimate claims, thus limiting their possibilities for participating.

A participatory process is a very costly and time-consuming activity and is therefore still restricted in many cases to those who can afford it. This is clearly shown in examples from countries with restrained economies. During the initial stage of forest policy reform in Kyrgyzstan, the process was organised and led by an international support project⁴ and, at a later stage, solely by the State Forest Agency. In both cases, the local population (a very important stakeholder with a great dependence on forest resources, but very weak economically and badly organised socially and politically) was only sporadically involved in the process (KOUPLÉVATSKAYA-YUNUSOVA 2005). This low level of participation is not merely down to limited economic resources; mechanisms for the representation of interests of non-organised stakeholders (NGOs, associations, etc) were practically non-existent in Kyrgyzstan. The interests of already marginal stakeholders therefore have very little chance of being represented.

Finally, quite often participation is not a spontaneous, free and open process of deliberation, but a procedure, which tends to be restricted to selected stakeholders. The selection may depend on the convener, on the various resources available for participation (not only material ones, but also time,

information, networking), and on the importance of the stakes. This may be organised consciously or happen spontaneously. But, in any case, in practice, a participation process is clearly moved by powerful and well-organised groups of stakeholders with well-defined interests and stakes. In forest policy processes, the forest service and the representatives from processing industries are often the most influential stakeholders as they have more resources available and more direct stakes.

When is the process open for participation?

When is the process opened up to public and who determines this moment? Who decides which issues are put on the agenda and advanced for participatory decision? In many cases, the role of the convener of the process is not attributed to an external intervener, but is taken (formally or not) by some of the stakeholders who have important stakes and are directly interested in the results of the process. These stakeholders are well organised, possess sufficient resources, the basic factual information and a clear vision of the expected result of the process. All those characteristics are usually attributed to the powerful structures, governmental and administrative bodies or institutions. Such bodies naturally promote technocratic rationalist top-down decision-making procedures, which is why they are able to open up the participation process when it fits the rationalist agenda:

- (i) When experts and deciders have already addressed the major topics, and the principle decision is taken. Participation in this case is a means for validation and legitimacy, a sort of a democratization of autocratic decisions.
- (ii) When the topics are external to the competence of the conveners of the process. However, in this case, the decision is not taken by the wider public but rather by groups of experts or powerful stakeholders who may be concerned by the topic. The exchange between them in the course of a participatory process may lead to the reassessment of the issue, and thus, these small groups involved in the process take final decision. The acid-rain debate of the 1980s in France, the selection of the territories for the Natura 2000 directive, or any establishment of a «specially protected area» status provide examples of such processes.
- (iii) When the topics are urgent and concern many stakeholders. The convener's grasp of the complex matter is likely to be inadequate and the process is therefore opened to participation – not only to gain information, but also to share responsibility (especially when decisions then taken risk being unsuccessful or unpopular). The openness of the process in this case, as well as the degree of the participants' involvement, also depends on the importance of the stakes and on the availability of resources and knowledge. For example, in France, the storms of December 1999 created a situation that required immediate reaction and the mobilisation of all necessary resources. An active and broad participation of all stakeholders was a spontaneous response to this emergency situation. Final decisions on the Relief Plan for Forests (Plan Chablis) were however limited to the representatives of private owners or forest communes, and environmental NGOs were not involved.
- (iv) When there is moral pressure or an external requirement to follow. With the international dialogue on sustainable

⁴ Kyrgyz-Swiss Forest Sector Support Programme, which is active in Kyrgyzstan since 1995.

forest management, international institutions exercise strong pressure on national governments to enable participatory approaches to define forest policies as a precondition for social sustainability. The NFP (National Forest Programmes) processes provide an example of this. In addition to this «moral»⁵ obligation, the requirement of participation is quite often directly or indirectly linked to financial instruments. For instance, many EU initiatives prescribe participation as a pre-requirement for financing. Such participatory requirements from donors are even more rigorous in the case of developing or transitional countries.

Finally, the moment of the process when participation is introduced, together with the reasons leading to the introduction and the issues on the agenda, have a decisive role on the nature of participation and its capacity to influence the decisions. However, as long as the better-organised stakeholders and stronger interests determine participation in forest policy, they are usually the ones who determine the moment and the agenda for participation. Consequently, directly or indirectly, these stakeholders may influence the nature of participation and hence, the «openness» of decisions.

This does not affect the democratic nature of the decision-making process: the mere fact that opinions and voices of people may be expressed in very different ways within various frameworks makes public deliberation or participation the basic corner stone and an integral element of any democratic process.

How can participation be «instrumentalised»?

In scientific discourses dealing with deliberation, democracy is often seen not only as an organisational principle but also as enhancing legitimacy, since it ensures the legitimate basis for decision-making processes. In this way, political decisions are reached through deliberative processes where participants negotiate opposing interests and justify their positions in view of the common good of a given reality. Such processes are thus ideally designed to foster mutual learning and to eventually transform preferences into a policy choice oriented to public interest, which is reached through social learning (SHANNON 1999).

The structural functionalist approach, on the other hand, considers policy as a process of transformation of demands and support into decisions (GAVENTA 1980); the involvement of stakeholders here is a question of who feeds the demands and how they are transformed into a decision. In this respect, a «common good» is at the core of participatory decision-making. This is likely to be a highly disputed point as far as forest management is concerned, where the interests of various stakeholders are so different and even opposed; moreover, the public judgement on what is a common good may be different from the opinions of other stakeholders. On whose opinion is the decision to be based?

Due to the specific nature of forestry (prevailing technical decisions, sectorial interests, stakes which are either symbolic and abstract, or specific for a particular group of owners, users) participation in forest policy processes is often limited to some stakeholders' groups. New participants to the process are always unequal from social, economic and even educational points of view. Some participants are better organised than the others (resources, networking), and are therefore better equipped to express their arguments and have their views and positions accepted by other actors. «Anyone who claims to know – and goes unchallenged that this cannot be done or that is the one and only alternative open, can achieve great effect on a decision» (LINDBLOM 1980). The process may

often be led or dominated by these stakeholders, and the related demands will correspond to their interests, excluding those of the less organised participants.

Even in the case of a very open process, the readiness to participate depends on the importance of the tabled question, which in turn defines the groups of stakeholders who will be more active in such participation, «feeding the decision» with their demands. Thus, especially in forest policy where the distinction between the direct interest groups (forestry administration, industries based on forest products, forest owners) and indirect interests (general public, other sectors, environmentalists) is clear, there is always a possibility that the decision will be taken with the domination of the stronger interest group. Simply opening up a decision-making process to «outside» participants does not necessarily guarantee an equitable decision, although it lends strong legitimacy to any decisions reached at the end of the process.

Public involvement in a policy definition process is also a means to disseminate information and increase knowledge of a particular topic among the lay public. During the forest policy reform process in Kyrgyzstan (KOUPLLEVATSKAYA-YUNUSOVA 2005), for example, many participants indicated that their involvement in the meetings and workshops during the different stages of the process had helped them to better understand the priorities and challenges of forest management and forestry in general. It also raised their levels of general knowledge on state policy, political processes and furnished them with practical information about the situation in other regions of the country. The reaction of mayors and representatives of the State Forest Agency (ONF) in the Vosges region of France was similar: discussions in public meetings caused the mayors to re-consider their vision of forest management priorities and look for new types of collaboration.

Viewed from this angle, participation is an instrument for creating new information and visions, even though, at the same time, the aspect of information may be one of the restricting factors for participation.

One argument often used to restrict participation in policy decisions is that lay people coming to the process do not always possess the necessary knowledge. Average citizens do not usually have the information required to comprehend the management of complex public affairs and arrive at a well-grounded rational choice. When the process is opened to the general public, the latter can usually only express agreement or disagreement with statements already formulated by the authorised decision-makers. This may lead to a firm guidance from an informed and politically active minority (ROBERTS 2004). This is especially true for such a technical field as forestry. Moreover, the uninformed public lacks a long-term and strategic vision, and its input carries no weight when decisions are taken. Paradoxically, this was the conclusion reached in the evaluation of the forest policy implementation (in Kyrgyzstan) after five years, although it was defined in a participatory way (KOUPLLEVATSKAYA-YUNUSOVA 2005). It is also commonly assumed that powerful participants seek to exclude discussion of issues that may damage their interests, and thus «filter» the information. This may be the case, for instance, regarding debates on genetically modified plants or atomic power stations, when, for the sake of strategic or corporative interests, only half-truths are given of possible side effects.

In fact, even the information received in the course of the process is «filtered» at several stages by those who convene or moderate the process:

⁵ International initiatives aimed at sustainable forest management do not carry any legal obligation.

- (i) as one of the objectives of a deliberative process is to find a compromise that leads to the «common good» by bringing all the various and opposed interests into the process, the search for a compromise leads to general statements that hide specific demands of multiple stakeholders.
- (ii) divergent interests must be weighed against each other, and the weighting of these is often left in the hands of the convenors of the processes who decide which interests are put on the agenda.
- (iii) a compromise on a «common good» can be only reached through negotiation that focuses exclusively on disputable aspects, and largely excludes controversial or non-negotiable points (such as ethical ones). In a common situation when marginal interests, (usually controversial points, as they are not shared by the others) are already under-represented in the process, and, thus excluded from the negotiation, the «common good» finally agreed on represents the views of an active and realistic majority, and the democratically agreed solution lies in the interests of some powerful stakeholders.

As for forestry decisions, despite on-going decentralisation and the rolling-back of the state, priority is still given to technical decisions, and participation is generally limited to discussions between specific stakeholders. The predominant perception of the forest as a timber resource and a sphere of technical experience does not encourage the participation of the general public in forest-related issues. Consequently, and despite diverse efforts to have a consultative process, the timber industry and the forestry administration retain their decision-making authority, and may thus promote a common interest that does not fit well with the interests of other stakeholders, involved or not involved into the participatory process.

As a conclusion

The requirement of participation in a policy process is usually presented as derived from the need for sustainable development and in order to reach realistic decisions that take account of all the various interests, priorities, potentials and risks. At the same time, it is the condition of a democratic society that «everyone should have a voice» and to find ways to empower its constituent citizens. Participation may therefore be considered from the point of view of a result (as an empowerment) as well as a process in itself (negotiation of controversial interests). In forest policy decisions the participatory process usually focuses more on the definition of a policy (or plan) than on implementation and assessment. The elaboration process is unlikely to be controversial, as participants discuss an abstract desired future, and not the concrete ways to achieve it. What can the stakeholders contribute to the process? The position of the administrators is invariably: «Participating citizens have the right to say what they want, but not how this should be achieved, this is the duty of experts».⁶ The public says what, and experts say how».

The convenors may be criticised as co-opting the process by giving other stakeholders the appearance of delegating authority and responsibility by inviting them to define policy, while they themselves retain control over processes and outcomes. The importance of technical know-how in forestry issues makes it even easier to exercise control. From this perspective, participation may be a means to create an illusion of democratic decision-making. The choice of information in a planning process is critical for the final decision. For this reason it is rarely neutral but guided instead by the type of infor-

mation that will support the policy outcome desired by the convenor or promoted by the most powerful stakeholders.

Nevertheless, even in this case, as participation was initiated to create social acceptability and legitimate decisions, the deciders – whoever they are – need to be accountable to the public for the decisions that are reached, and are therefore obliged to adapt their positions and decisions to the results of the discussion.

If participation is assessed as a process, to the learning and psychological effects on the participants are usually accorded major importance. Participants in these processes face each other from unequal positions of power, and differ with regard to socio-economic class, knowledge and information abilities that separate experts from laypersons, or from personal capacities for deliberation and persuasion associated with educational and occupational advantages (SHANNON 1999). The exchange of views and additional information that a process enables may also change the positions of the other stakeholders and adds an important component of social learning. This may lead to the formulation of new alliances and strong stakeholders, while at the same time bringing new (formerly absent) stakeholders into the arena. Notwithstanding its weak or critical points, participation as a process does, therefore, have a clear impact on power redistribution.

The iterativity of power

Regardless of the differences in approaches to democracy and power, one common feature is the possibility to influence, to decide, and to profit from the situation. The idea of a democratic process is to share decision-making power. Procedures for democratic processes are determined by the norms, which are usually defined by powerful institutional structures. The powerful structures necessarily define the norms in ways that help them to retain power and there is thus always the possibility that democratic processes will be used to consolidate already existing power. Does this mean that we are trapped in a vicious circle? Power can indeed be used to dominate others, and enables the strongest to act. The corollary of this, however, is that it gives other («powerless») actors the option of thinking and acting differently, not necessarily always following the most powerful. Social learning within a participatory process influences power distribution. Having achieved a position of power, most powerful groups have a relatively limited life span. They grow decadent, decay, lose their vigour and come to be replaced by other, more vigorous groups.

Thus, the cycle of power redistribution is an iterative process, with its own mechanisms, rules and laws. An analysis of participation within the framework of an evolving process of change therefore leads to the involvement of participants in the dynamics of a re-distribution of power. A participatory process is necessarily a mechanism that not only changes the procedure for decision-making, but also the context, bringing in new positional balances amongst the stakeholders. In a way, participation always represents a challenge to power holders by generating power re-distribution or consolidation. It may even be questioned whether this co-substantial element in a participatory process is not a main reason for this process in itself, whether in forest policy reform or in other fields of application.

⁶ This phrase repeatedly cropped up in the pre-assessment study of the GOFOR project to describe the position of the forestry services in different countries with regard to participation in forest policy.

Summary

Participation promotes democracy, lends more weight to people's voices, and empowers citizens by giving them the means to share in decision-making processes. At the same time, through political learning, it leads to a redefinition of issues and, thus, to a redistribution of power. Nevertheless, the term «participation» is, in itself, very controversial, which might help to explain the wide range of attitudes of various stakeholders. Any type of participatory process is ruled by a hidden agenda, because the ability to influence a decision brings power. If power is the core issue of a democratic participatory decision-making process, how do we avoid the risks arising from manipulation or the outright abuse of democracy? Based on empirical evidence drawn from experiences of forest policy reforms as well as on an analysis of the basic theoretical frameworks, the paper questions whether participation is a pre-condition for democracy. In order to analyse the relationship between the requirements of democracy and their practical implications, a general overview of the concepts of democracy and types of participation is presented. The question of power is treated within the context of decision-making processes and the impact of participation on the empowerment of some groups of stakeholders.

Résumé

Association des groupes d'intérêts au processus de réforme de la politique forestière: promotion de la démocratie et redistribution du pouvoir

La participation promeut la démocratie, concède plus de poids aux opinions de la population et permet aux citoyens de s'engager dans les processus de décision. Au niveau de l'apprentissage politique, elle entraîne simultanément une redéfinition des problèmes et une redistribution du pouvoir. Toutefois, la notion de «participation» est très ambiguë, ce qui peut expliquer la variété des points de vue de différents groupes d'intérêts. Chaque type de processus de participation est déterminé par un programme «secret» parce que le pouvoir dépend de la capacité d'influencer une décision. Si le pouvoir est le problème central du processus de décision avec participation démocratique, comment pouvons-nous faire pour éviter les risques de manipulation et d'abus de pouvoir? Se basant sur des preuves empiriques fondées sur les expériences faites en matière de réformes de la politique forestière et de l'analyse de systèmes théoriques fondamentaux, l'article pose la question de savoir si la participation ne constitue pas une condition préalable à la démocratie. Afin d'analyser la relation entre les exigences de la démocratie et ses implications pratiques, un aperçu général présente ensuite les concepts de démocratie et les types de participation. La question du pouvoir est traitée dans le contexte des processus de décision, ainsi que de participation et de l'influence de certains groupes d'intérêts.

Traduction: CLAUDE GASSMANN

Zusammenfassung

Der Einbezug der Stakeholder im forstpolitischen Reformprozess: Förderung der Demokratie und Neuverteilung von Macht

Mitwirkung wirbt für Demokratie, verleiht der Stimme des Volks grösseres Gewicht und ermöglicht es Bürgern, sich in Entscheidungsprozesse einzubringen. Im politischen Lernprozess führt dies gleichzeitig zu einer Neudefinierung der Angelegenheiten und ebenso zu einer Neuverteilung von Macht. Trotzdem ist der Begriff «Mitwirkung» sehr vieldeutig und kann

erklären, warum verschiedene Interessenvertreter bzw. Stakeholder so unterschiedliche Standpunkte vertreten. Jede Variante von Mitwirkungsprozess ist von einer «versteckten» Agenda bestimmt, weil die Fähigkeit, eine Entscheidung zu beeinflussen, Macht mit sich bringt. Wenn Macht zu einem Kernproblem im demokratisch-partizipatorischen Entscheidungsprozess wird, wie können wir dann die Risiken der Manipulation und des Machtmissbrauchs verhindern? Gestützt auf empirische Beweise, die auf Erfahrungen mit Reformen der Forstpolitik und auf der Analyse grundlegender theoretischer Systeme beruhen, wird gefragt, ob Mitwirkung eine Vorbedingung für Demokratie ist. Um die Beziehung zwischen den Anforderungen der Demokratie und deren praktischen Implikationen zu analysieren, folgt ein allgemeiner Überblick über Konzepte von Demokratie und Typen der Mitwirkung. Die Frage nach der Macht wird im Kontext von Entscheidungs- und Mitwirkungsprozessen und der Beeinflussung von Stakeholder-Gruppen gestellt.

Übersetzung: MARGRIT IRNIGER

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