



Research trend: Power analyses in polycentric and multi-level forest governance



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ABSTRACT

Forest policy analyses have increasingly employed political, sociological and jurisprudence theories to explain the fundamental social and political outcomes of particular forest policies and programs. A new strand of forest policy analysis even contributes to the creation of new theories and frameworks. One of the novel advances of this discipline is the theoretical framework of Actor-Centred Power (ACP) that is dedicated for power analyses. We comment on the recent scholarship employing the framework and propose future research directions. We identify potential gaps for the use of the theoretical framework for analysing power relationships in polycentric and multi-level forest governance. They include key questions for the theory, methods, and empirical research that warrant for close observation in the future.

1. Introduction

Forest policy science, as [de Jong et al. \(2012\)](#) note, has shifted from “science for policy”, which aims to make normative policy advises over particular problems related to forests and forestry, to “science of policy” which employs interdisciplinary political, sociological and jurisprudence theories to explain the fundamental social and political outcomes of particular forest policies and programs. A new strand of forest policy analysis even contributes to the creation of new theories and frameworks ([Arts, 2012](#)). As a departure, we refer forest policy to as a social bargaining process for regulating conflict of interests with regard to forests ([Krott, 2005](#)), with the fundamental focus on who benefits and who loses ([Byron, 2006](#); [Maryudi, 2015](#)).

As such, understanding the actors involved in the policy making and implementation, and the power relations between them are key factors for the fruitful analysis ([Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016](#)). From the old days of Weber, conceptions on power have diverged. [Arts and van Tatenhove \(2004\)](#) provide a useful categorization of power theories, and point out a theoretical strand that analyses how an actor steers the social interactions to achieve its interests. One of the novel advances of the actor-oriented power analysis that caught our close attention is the theoretical framework of Actor-Centred Power (ACP), developed by the Krott school of thought, published in this journal in 2014 titled “*Actor-centred power: The driving force in decentralised community based forest governance*”.

2. ACP: Its genesis and the recent uses

Using decentralised community-based forest governance, the actor-oriented approach provides approach to reveal the empirical evidence why an actor within particular social interactions has been able to determine the outcomes of a policy program ([Krott et al., 2014](#)). Its genesis was driven by the concern that despite the many complex concepts on power, only a few can be applied in empirical research. ACP aims to fill this gap. [Krott et al. \(2014: 35\)](#) argue that ACP is designed “*as an analytical, theory-based and empirically applicable framework for assessing actors' power*”. It aims to make power observable as it is “*invisible...[and]...may occur in the imagination of the actors*” ([Krott et al., 2014](#)).

ACP conceptualizes power as the capacity of an actor to impose own will to others, specifically drawing on the conception of “power over”, instead of “power to” (see [Prabowo et al., 2017](#)). It further specifies sources power –its foundation was laid as the power factors ([Hasanagas, 2004](#)): i.e. Coercion, incentives/disincentives, and dominant information. [Maryudi et al. \(2015a\)](#) argue that the first two power sources buys the conception on policy instruments of “sticks and carrots”; an actor employs pressure and financial incentives to alter behaviour of the other. Information is also conceived as a source of power when it cannot be verified easily ([Krott and Hasanagas, 2006](#)). [Hasanagas \(2016\)](#) underlines that certain information can distinguish powerful factors from what he dubs as a mere “postman” (information channels or transmitters) when the information cannot be confronted by other

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actors in the networks. The concept of dominant trust is broader than professional trust as Lund (2015) argues; it can be both true and fabricated. The emphasis is the situation in which the information is unverified and blindly trusted so that its recipient acts in accordance to what is expected by the transmitter.

Within a short space of time, as we observe, ACP has since drawn interests from numerous forest policy scholars. It is used in numerous cross-cutting forest policy issues at different levels from local to global, such as climate change and REDD + (Brockhaus et al., 2014), land use conflicts (Setiawan et al., 2016; Prabowo et al., 2017; Susanti and Maryudi, 2016), development and aids (Aurenhammer, 2012; Burns and Giessen, 2016; Burns et al., 2017), decentralization and devolution (Ojha et al., 2014; Mohammed and Inoue, 2014; Kumar et al., 2015; Schusser et al., 2016; Maryudi et al., 2015b), urban forest planning (Kangas et al., 2014), biodiversity policy (Rahman et al., 2016), and scientific knowledge transfer (Boecher, 2016; Scheba and Mustalahti, 2015). Furthermore, the theory has also been enhanced with considering power gain and loses over space and time (Prabowo et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2016; Sarker et al., 2017).

3. The research trends using ACP in polycentric and multi-level forest governance

3.1. Interplays between actors at different policy spheres

There are variations how Krottsians see potential actors that exist at different spheres or playing fields. Interplays between spheres and the social interactions of actors at different spheres are highly possible since forest is a multidimensional resource on which numerous actors for local to international levels may have a stake (Krott, 2005; Maryudi, 2016). Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) highlight the importance of distinguishing actors at different levels. They observe the apparent negligence of the existing theoretical frameworks of the power relations between actors at different levels. A number of empirical studies employing ACP as the theoretical framework clearly see this research gap. For instance are the empirical analyses on international influences, i.e. development aid agencies, on domestic policies (e.g. Rahman et al., 2016; Burns and Giessen, 2016; Burns et al., 2017). It is here crucial whether or not to include international actors (e.g. donors) when analysing power relation at the domestic or national sphere.

International funding agencies generally have interests in institutionalising certain discursive practices and ideas, but they may pursue different pathways, either directly involve in policy process or utilize the powerful national agencies to transmit their agendas. While acknowledge the influence of international donors, some (e.g. Sarker et al., 2017; Brockhaus et al., 2014) do not treat them as distinct actors per se. They focus on the power relations between national bureaucracies, how particular agencies consolidate their power through the “help” of international donors, which they argue, only “empower” certain national bureaucracies. In contrast, Giessen et al. (2016) and Sahide et al. (2016b) consider international funding agencies as distinctly direct actors.

A number of Krottsians have also examined multi-level power relations at the domestic arena, i.e. interplays between local and national actors. For instance, both Maryudi et al. (2015a) and Prabowo et al. (2017) analyse power relations at the local level in land conflicts in Indonesia, they see differently on the role of the forest ministry. It is true that the ministry (a potential actor at the national sphere) regulates forest land use and allocation, but it does not necessarily mean that the state agency automatically becomes a direct actor in particular power relations. While Prabowo et al. (2017) includes the ministry as a distinct actor, Maryudi et al. (2015a) disregard it based on the contexts, i.e. the way it behaves in the studied cases. It is therefore important to carefully assess whether or not a particular actor is directly involved in the power relations.

3.2. Categorization of actors

Categorization of actors is crucial in the use of ACP. Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) observe the lack of clarity on in actor categorizations in power analyses. Several studies appears to simplify the actors involved. This potentially occurs in polycentric policy arenas where different types of actors may interact. For instance, the state/government or Department of Forestry is regarded as a single unit (see Brockhaus et al., 2012, Mohammed and Inoue 2014, Schusser et al., 2015; Giessen et al., 2016), regardless the existence of numerous bureaucratic agencies often with conflicting mandates and informal interests (Niskanen, 1971). In fact, even within a single bureaucracy like the Ministry/ Department of Forestry there might be conflicting agendas, such as between conservation and production interests (see Sahide and Giessen, 2015), or different alignments to business people or local communities (see Kusters et al. 2007). The bipolar categorization of central-local governments in decentralization policy could be misleading in power analyses.

Careless categorization may lead to a serious flaw in a way important and powerful actors may not be captured in the power analyses. Powerful actors may stay away from the spotlight so that they cannot be easily identified. Potential powerful actors may include banks, loan agencies, traders, business people or even multinational corporations, etc. They are often neglected in some cases, despite the fact their influence can be traced through the behaviour of other actors (see Prabowo et al., 2017). In this regard, future studies on power should take into consideration the clear definition of actors and their interests.

Avelino and Wittmayer (2016) offer a heuristic framework called Multi-actor Perspective (MaP) to fill the analytical gap for specifying different categories of actors at different levels. The MaP distinguishes actor categories: (1) informal-formal, (2) for profit-non-profit and (3) public-private, which are further classified based on the following levels of aggregation: (1) sectors, (2) individual actors, and (3) organizational actors. Schusser et al. (2016: 82) define an actor as “any entity that has any entity that has a distinct interest and the possibility of influencing a policy”. Actors can be individualistic or collective organizations with distinct interests.

3.3. Power dependence

In the Krott School, power is rooted from the political behavioural approaches, instead of psychological or sociological disciplines. Political behavioural depends on the actors' position and interests, therefore a clear distinction between or among power elements becomes crucial. The existing power analyses using ACP appear to treat the actors are always independent or in opposition one another in the networks. Only few (e.g. Maryudi et al., 2015a; Prabowo et al., 2017) considers coalitions or mutual support between actors so that their relative position in the power networks enhanced. To influence the policy outcomes, each actor may establish social interaction in the form of cooperation. In a particular network, actors may have either partners or adversaries (Hasanagas, 2016). Maryudi et al. (2015a) reveal that the fact that local farmers are able to occupy state forestland is explained by either the strong support from local non-governmental organizations that strongly advocate access by local people to state forests, or strong opposition to the coercive approach used by the state agency toward local people. Prabowo et al. (2017) also show the power of a palm oil company in Indonesia, mirrored by its ability to occupy state forestland licensed to a company, is partly due to its ability to obtain the support from local communities.

3.4. Linkages of ACP with other political theories

How ACP is linked with other theories also interests us. Recently, it is has been tailored with other political theories, such as bureaucratic

politics (Wibowo and Giessen, 2015; Ongolo, 2015; Sahide et al., 2016a; Rahman et al., 2016), development policy (Aurenhammer, 2012), and international forest regimes (Sahide et al., 2016b; Giessen et al., 2016; Burns and Giessen, 2016). Its linkage with bureaucratic politics (BP) theory is our particular interest, coming into a new 'bureaucratic power framework' (see Rahman et al., 2016; Sahide et al., 2016a, b). Nonetheless, BP has limitation in capturing the whole story, particularly in arenas that involve diverse non-state actors (Art, 1973; Ball, 1974). A solo use of BP will unlikely explain the polycentric situations.

Therefore, the bureaucratic power approach is made as an ACP's variant simply to capture more clearly the larger phenomenon. One example, bureaucratic power is very useful to analyse recentralisation power in policies that are formally designated for decentralization (see Sahide et al., 2016a, b). Other example, Yusran et al. (2017) successfully capture conflict visibility between conservation bureaucracies and non-state actors, in the polycentric and multilevel analysed situation. This is made possible by combining BP theory with the examination on actors' interests. We acknowledge that BP theory may work not only for state bureaucracy but also its cliental surrounding bureaucracy. However, the theory will lack its shape when cliental bureaucracy is the central analysis. Considering this, Yusran et al. (2017) adopt the tailored framework, i.e. bureaucratic power as an ACP's variant, and successfully explain more succinctly and clearly what, why and how a particular policy instrument is chosen by bureaucrats, and more importantly who benefit from.

4. Future research agendas

To sum up, we note that the theoretical framework of ACP is useful for power analyses, including in in polycentric and multi-level forest governance. We identify potential gaps that warrant for close observation in the future:

- ACP is actor-oriented approach; identification and categorization of actors are crucial. We suggest that the future research should capture the actors in details. For the methodological consequence, tailoring MaP approach (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2016) with ACP look promising in order to capture the clearer picture of the analysed power relations.
- An innovative set of tools and methods is required: 1) to link ACP approach with the broader multidiscipline application (e.g. cultural identity, land use transformation, etc.) and 2) to translate the power analyses into policies and practices.
- Few empirical have been successfully tailored ACP with other theories. For analysing power relation in polycentric and multi-level forest governance, ACP has potentials to being tailored with political theories, e.g. political economy, environmental justice etc., since those theories also deals with power issues.
- A spectrum of actors exists at different policy spheres. They are directly and indirectly involved in specific policy making and implementation. Whether or not they are categorized as actors depends on the specific studied cases and the goals of the power analyses.
- Power dependence between actors warrants for closer examination in the future research agenda. Few empirical studies have explored how powerful actors steer the less powerful actors and use their power to the rest actors in the networks. Interactions between or among power sources, i.e. coercion, incentives, dominant information, remain unobserved.

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