



Defining and assessing forest governance



1. Forest governance research

Research into forest governance issues is a popular and timely endeavour. This is reflected e.g. by a large number of publications (e.g. [Giessen et al., 2009](#); [Kleinschmit et al., 2009](#) introducing to and concluding on a special issue of this journal (Vol. 11, 5–6) on expertise in forest governance and [Buttoud, 2012](#) introducing to a special issue of this journal (Vol. 18) on economic mechanisms in forest governance; similar [Hogl et al., 2012](#); [Arts et al., 2012](#); [Art and Visseren-Hamakers, 2012](#); [Rametsteiner, 2009](#); [Agrawal et al., 2008](#); [Glück et al., 2005](#)). The high relevance of international forest governance research is further reflected by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) dedicating to this very topic its group 9.05 on Forest Policy and Governance, which includes a special working group 9.05.02 on Forest Governance. This special issue is a result of this ongoing scholarly work.

Forest governance research can be understood as social science inquiry into forest-related decisions, their implementation and resulting effects within a given institutional setting. In order to arrive at relevant and valid conclusions, social science inquiry, more than their physical sciences counterparts, need to clearly define the terms, concepts and methodological frameworks which they apply ([Krott and Giessen 2014](#)—in this issue). Unfortunately, this is not easily and, hence, not always done in forest governance research, running the risk of rendering the concept of forest governance a buzzword, rather than advancing scientific rigor.

At the core of the concept lie recent empirical observations about the changing role of private actors and institutions *vis a vis* the state with its government, multiple administrative actors and binding norms, rules, and procedures. An early claim within the political science about ‘governance without government’ (e.g. [Rhodes, 1996](#); [Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992](#)) led to numerous studies at multiple levels on the role and effects of private actors and institutions. This is reflected by forest governance studies addressing issues such as forest certification, national forest programmes, community forestry and decentralisation, payment for ecosystem services, and international forest deliberations ([Glück et al., 2005](#)). This view was later challenged by critiques (e.g. [Agrawal et al., 2008](#); [Arts, 2014](#)—in this issue; [Bell and Hindmoor, 2012](#); [Howlett et al., 2009](#); [Hysing, 2009](#); [Giessen, 2010](#); [Peters and Pierre, 1998](#)) for the strong focus of governance research on private actors and institutions. This gave rise for the advancement of the forest governance research programme towards scrutinizing both, private as well as public actors and institutions and their interplay in light of their effects on forests.

This broader conception of forest governance promises analytical added value in two ways. Firstly, it promotes social science research

which engages with the broader settings, the interplay between public and private actors and institutions as well as formal and informal aspects of forest-related decisions, their implementation and effects. Secondly, the concept of forest governance spurs interdisciplinary research among the forest-related social sciences such as political science, sociology, legal studies and economics, but also between the social and the physical science. The endeavour of the forest governance research programme of also scrutinizing the effects of public and private actors’ decisions and their implementation creates research bridges between the social science disciplines and physical science inquiry analysing biophysical effects, which social sciences alone are not able to generate (comp. [Giessen, 2013a](#)).

2. Defining forest governance

In the abovementioned sense we propose a wide definition of forest governance, which scholars may find useful to build upon and to further develop according to their empirical cases. Accordingly, **forest governance comprises a) all formal and informal, public and private regulatory structures, i.e. institutions consisting of rules, norms, principles, decision procedures, concerning forests, their utilisation and their conservation, b) the interactions between public and private actors therein and c) the effects of either on forests.**

The shortcoming of such a wide definition is that it is difficult to cover all these aspects within the methodology of one study, while at the same time maintaining scientific rigour. Rather, a number of smaller, particular studies may be expected (and actually have been reported already), each focusing on a different aspect of forest governance. In such a research programme, forest governance studies often focus on a particular level of analysis, ranging from global to international to national to regional and local. Accordingly, it may be useful to focus the above definition of forest governance to any of these levels as one among other criteria for categorising these studies. This requires developing and adapting definitions and concepts on global forest governance (e.g. [Giessen, 2013a,b](#)), international forest governance (e.g. [Rayner et al., 2010](#)), national forest governance (e.g. [Krott 2005](#)), regional forest governance (e.g. [Giessen, 2010](#)), and local forest governance ([Djogo and Syaf, 2004](#); [Secco et al. 2014](#)—in this issue)

Given the aforementioned recent progressions in the forest governance research programme, the aim of this special issue is to further advance forest governance research by going beyond vague statements about private actors and institutions, but rather developing methodological and conceptual frameworks for assessing forest governance at multiple levels.

The contributions to this special issue have been elicited from the first IUFRO All-Division-9-conference which was held in Sarajevo,

Bosnia & Herzegovina, from 8–11 May 2012 with some 170 participants from 52 countries from all over the world. The conference was hosted by the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo and has been supported by the Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research (FOPER) project, the IUFRO Special Programme for Developing Countries (SPDC) and the USDA Forest Service. Gerard Buttoud on behalf of the IUFRO research group 9.05.00 and the working party 9.05.01 organised a focused session around the topic of 'assessing forest governance in a context of change'. The papers presented to this session were edited into a proceedings volume (Avdibegović et al., 2012)¹ and the most promising ones have been edited into this special issue.

3. Assessing forest governance

Assessing forest governance can be done as a scientific endeavour conducted within the scientific realm, or as a practical enterprise undertaken by actors in the field of forest conservation and utilisation practices.

Within the scientific realm, the researchers are guided by methodological frameworks, which they develop intersubjectively in order to advance scientific knowledge about real world phenomena. There are two broad approaches for such scientific analyses: *Analytical* studies are concerned with the mere reflection of these phenomena and their explanation and strive for developing value-free methodological frameworks. In contrast, *normative* analyses imply value judgements on desirable conditions within their methodological frameworks and often develop recommendations towards selected ends. In both approaches, the researchers are free to define their concepts and hypotheses on potential causalities following scientific thought and rigour.

On the contrary, *practice-oriented assessments* of forest governance inherently imply value judgements which are closely related to the interests of the authors' organisations developing the methodological frameworks. Recently, a number of such practice-oriented frameworks for assessing forest governance have been developed (FAO et al., 2014; WRI et al., 2013). In such works, value judgements are an implicit or even explicit part of the methodological framework. WRI et al. (2013), for example, build on the normative concept of good forest governance. This does not mean that such assessments are non-scientific; they often are a combination of scientific and practical aspects which are integrated and through this provide for added value to real world challenges (similar Stevanov et al., 2013).

4. Outline of this special issue

This special issue subscribes to the tradition of assessing forest governance within the scientific realm. It strives to provide for introducing a number of different methodological frameworks for scientifically assessing forest governance at multiple levels. It does so by firstly introducing as well as reviewing and discussing the new 'practice based approach' methodological framework to assessing forest governance in two review articles (Arts et al. 2014–in this issue, Krott and Giessen 2014–in this issue).

With their framework, Arts et al. (2014–in this issue) offer a 'comprehensive understanding of social dynamics related to trees, forests and biodiversity [...and it] tries to go beyond some of the old dualisms in social theory, such as subject and object, human and nature and agency and structure'. The framework rests upon three sensitising concepts – situated agency, logic of practice and performativity – and applies them to a number of empirical examples from forest governance practices.

Krott and Giessen (2014–in this issue) take up these methodological advancements and discuss them in light of different ontologies

and epistemologies as well as regarding their compatibility with and added value for mainstream approaches.

In his conceptual contribution, Arts (2014–in this issue) develops a theory-driven conceptual framework overcoming some of the shortcomings of the forest governance research programme. The author explains the emergence of the forest governance concept from the shortcomings of forest government, or 'state forestry' and criticises the concept of forest governance using a governmentality perspective assuming that control by the state and self-governance by people go hand in hand.

Brockhaus et al. (2014–in this issue) investigate how aspects of governance systems, namely the policy context, the influence of key actors and their discursive practices, are affecting national-level forest governance, using REDD + as an example.

Krott et al. (2014–in this issue) develop an analytical, theory-based and empirically applicable methodological framework for assessing an actor's power using community forestry as an illustrative case. The actor-centred power approach (ACP) provides for a scientific answer to the question of who are the politically most powerful actors in any given forest governance setting and is universally applicable to multiple cases.

Böhling and Arzberger (2014–in this issue) start from the limited understanding about forest agencies' role in the adoption of new governance modes. In providing a focused methodological framework for their qualitative implementation study the authors find that the involvement of local stakeholders in forest planning is not necessarily instrumental for delivery of effective policies.

Stojanovska et al. (2014–in this issue) develop a framework assessing the contribution of forest management plans to new modes of governance, scrutinizing the governance principles of participation, transparency and accountability in particular. The authors apply this framework to the rarely studied, yet from a forest governance perspective highly interesting country of Macedonia.

Lastly, Secco et al. (2014–in this issue) present an original set of indicators to measure the quality of forest governance at local level and the method used to develop them. In doing so, the authors aim to close a gap in methodological approaches which so far largely ignored local levels of forest governance – a level where concrete decisions of e.g. forest owners and managers are taken and cause very tangible effects.

The collection of articles in this special issue contributes to the theoretical and methodological advancements of forest governance research. In a way, however, they raise more questions than providing answers, especially conceptual and methodological ones that should be addressed in the patchwork of future forest governance studies.

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¹ The proceedings volume is accessible online under: <http://doniblagojevic.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/iufro-proceedings-assessing-forest-governance-in-a-context-of-change-12122012-final.pdf>.

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