

Reflections on the approaches of Working Group 1 (WG1) and Working Group 2 (WG2) and their co-ordination

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1 Introductory Remarks

During internal discussions after our COST-meeting in Madrid some questions concerning the approaches of the two Working Groups as well as the question of how to co-ordinate their future actions were raised. We came across some open questions about the conceptions, that should – at least from our perspective - be discussed and clarified in the working groups. Without intending to anticipate further necessary discussions, we have developed some ideas and approaches towards open questions, which are worth to be summarised here and to be further discussed in the COST-Action.

This paper aims at outlining our understanding of the present approach of Working Group 1 (WG1) as well as some considerations about the approach of Working Group 2 (WG2). It is meant to facilitate further discussions on these approaches on the one hand, and to provide a vantage point for the co-ordination of the two Working Groups on the other hand.

We think that the conceptions that are outlined below (in particular the one for WG2) represent coherent but quite ambitious “research programmes”, which can hardly be dealt with comprehensively in the course of the COST-Action. Nevertheless, we are quite convinced that they can serve as “road maps” allowing to locate the analytical approaches of the COST-Action within the complex topic “NFP”. At the least, we hope to contribute to conceptual clarity.

2 Reflections on the Approach of Working Group 1

2.1 WG1 Research Topics

The Workplan of COST-Action E19 defines the following research topics to be dealt with by WG1¹:

Rationale: Common understanding of basic elements and institutional/procedural requirements of NFPs guiding the formulation and implementation of NFPs.

Tasks: Interpretation of the basic elements and institutional/procedural requirements of NFPs (in particular participatory mechanisms, iterative process, intersectoral approach, conflict resolution schemes) and evaluation of their effects to NFPs.

¹ Workplan 1999-2003; final draft, 21st March 2000, p.4

2.2 The Analytical Approach

At our first meeting (Freiburg) we started from the assumption, that we are facing two main problems when trying to elaborate our approach:

- (1) Firstly and above all, a commonly accepted operational definition of NFPs is still missing.
- (2) Secondly, in a number of processes and publications NFPs (e.g., FAO 1996, IPF/IFF-process, Tulln 1999) have been characterised by means of „basic principles“, „elements“, „key elements“ and the like. The terms and the formulations used in these initiatives are, however, quite different. In addition to that, they remain vague and do not provide a basis for a common understanding of NFPs.

To find a common starting point for the discussions of the working group and to be able to develop a common analytical approach in spite of the problems mentioned above, we fell back to the concept of “modern policy planning”. We proceeded on the assumption, that at its core the concept of NFPs shares those main characteristics which are postulated for the concept of modern policy planning, i.e. long-term iterative and adaptive processes, participatory mechanisms, broad co-ordination of relevant actors, etc. These characteristics can provide a reference for the work of WG1.

To make the workplan feasible a restriction with regard to our object of research (i.e., „elements and procedural requirements of NFPs“) had to be made. To do so, we referred to the results of the Freiburg-seminar (1998) and a NFP-workshop which was organised by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Tulln, 1999). Based on that, we specified four „core elements“:

- Participatory mechanisms
- Conflict resolution schemes
- Intersectoral approaches
- Iterative processes

Although the terminology of these “core elements” stems from political processes, they can not be equated or directly compared with the corresponding elements in the lists, that followed these political initiatives.² Rather they are broader in scope, in the sense of „fields to look at“³. Accordingly, WG1 has used the expression „conceptual essentials of NFPs“ to characterise their status and to explicitly distinguish them from the politically „defined“ elements.

In the course of the discussions in WG1 it was argued that the aspect of “negotiating” was still missing and that „conflict resolution schemes“ could also be dealt with under the heading „participation“.

Finally, members of WG1 agreed that the workplan should not be too closely oriented on lists of “core elements” and the like. Rather we should orientate ourselves on

² Compared to the elements listed in political documents (of the FAO or from the IPF-process, e.g.) our four „core elements“ are meant to be more extensive in scope. For example: The FAO-list of elements explicitly and separately mentions „partnership“ and „capacity building“. These elements are not at all neglected by WG1, rather they are seen as aspects of „participatory mechanisms“ or „intersectoral co-ordination“, e.g.

³ see the Minutes of the 1st WG1-Meeting, p. 9

theoretical approaches/concepts, which can be directly related to these “core elements”. This should ensure that WG1 will not only gather and compare existing experiences with regard to these „elements“ of NFPs, but will also work out additional theoretical findings and theory-based insights.

The following workplan was finally developed and decided:

- Spain (autumn 2000) *Policy Planning* (developing a common understanding for the discussions on „policy planning“, to be enable sound discussions in subsequent meetings)
- Scotland (spring 2001): *Participatory approaches*
- Norway (autumn 2001): *Collaborative approaches* (negotiation, communication)
- Finland (spring 2002): *Inter-sectoral approaches*
- Portugal (autumn 2002): *Procedural approaches* (iterative, adaptive, learning)
- Austria (spring 2003): *Synthesis*

By way of summarising, the approach of WG1 can be outlined as follows (see Figure 1): We left the level of political definitions of NFPs and their elements and decided to look for the underlying theoretical approaches. Then, we specified four “core elements” which from our perspective constitute the core of the NFP-concept. Because these core elements are part of one concepts, namely that of NFPs, they can not and should not be looked at individually and separately. We have to take into account their interrelations with all other elements. Figure 1 aims to highlight this aspect by representing the elements as a jigsaw puzzle. The vague and open character of the *political* definition of NFPs is indicated by the dotted line. The field in the middle of the jigsaw puzzle („other elements“) indicates that besides the four “core elements” WG1 will also consider other elements/aspects, whenever it seems promising to do so. Since we expect to enhance our knowledge in the course of the COST-Action, we prefer to keep the approach of WG1 open and flexible.

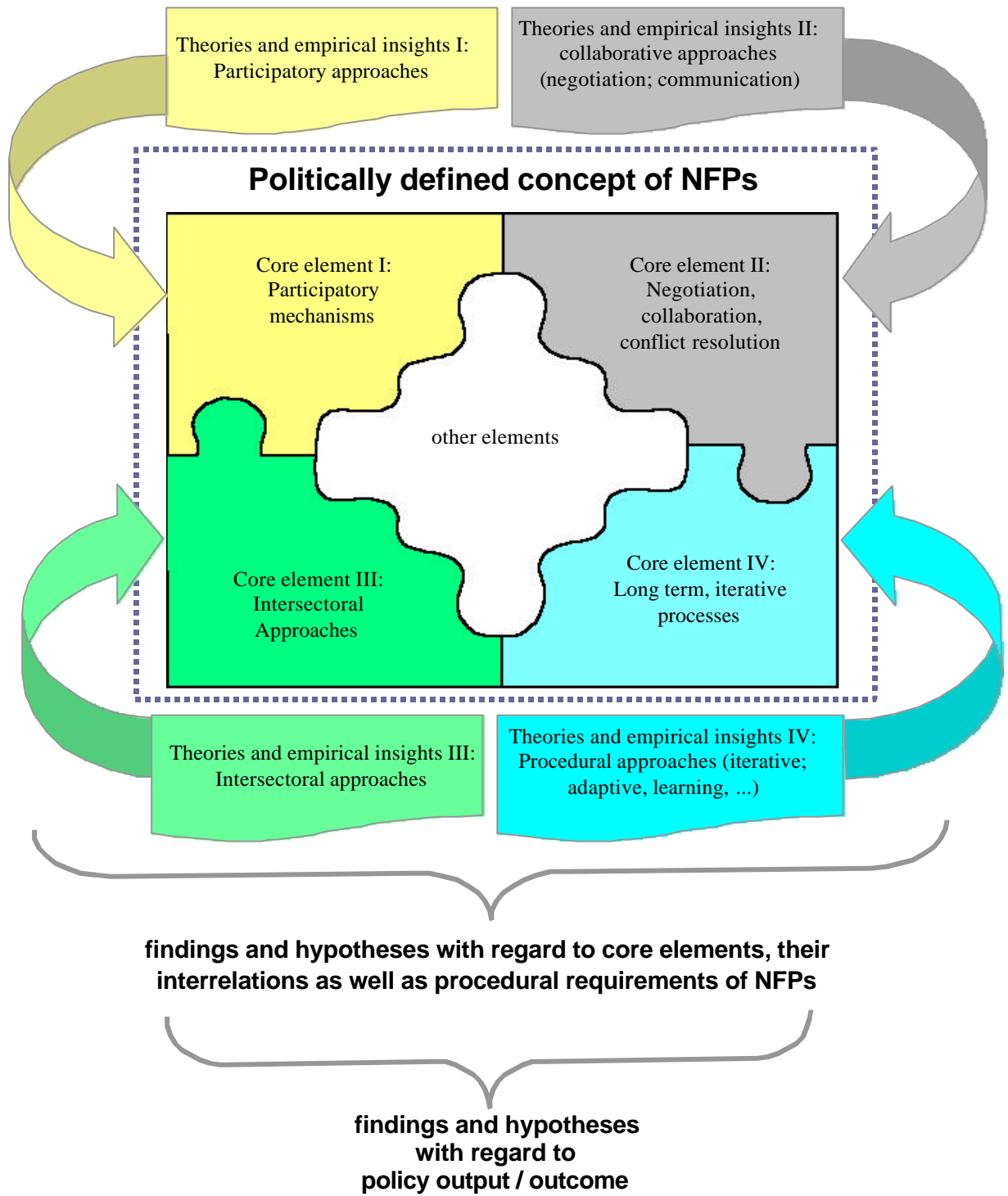
In each of the following meetings WG1 will focus on existing experiences about one “core element” (country reports) and on the respective theoretical approaches or theories. In doing so, WG1 will take account of inter-relations to other core elements as appropriate.

Figuratively spoken, WG1 operates outside the frame which encloses the politically defined NFP (see Figure 1). WG1 will primarily deal with promising theories and concepts as well as existing experiences. From there, it wants to shed some theory-guided light on the core of the NFP-concept. By bringing together theory and experience it aims at arriving at hypotheses and findings about the “core elements” and their interrelations. In the end it should become possible to deduce meaningful conclusions with regard to “institutional and procedural requirements of NFPs”.

Moreover, WG1 does not pre-confine itself to examining “theories and experiences as regards the core elements”. The theories and experiences worked with and the findings and hypotheses deduced from that shall be used to arrive at further findings/hypotheses on *policy outputs* on the one hand (NFP-documents, forestry guidelines, laws, new definitions of SFM, e.g.), as well as on *policy outcomes* on the other hand (i.e., on the impacts in the field).

⁴ As regards “policy outcomes” we have to bear in mind that so far hardly any European country has started to implement a NFP. Therefore the empirical basis will be rather thin.

Figure 1: The Approach of Working Group 1



3 Reflections on a Possible Approach for Working Group 2

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the main aims of WG2 are

- „to evaluate the significance of NFPs in comparison to other policy means“ and
- „to assess supportive and impeding factors for the development of substantive NFPs“⁵

With this paper, we intend to make these two complex targets more operational and to integrate them into a comprehensive analytical framework. This framework is depicted in Figure 2. The Working Group design presented here comprises three analytical steps:⁶

- Step 1 analyses the influence of the so-called “external factors” (= “supportive and impeding factors”) on NFPs (or elements thereof).
- Step 2 aims at the analysis of “policy outputs” of NFPs.
- Step 3 covers the *implementation process* (where “policy outputs” are translated into “policy outcomes”).

On each of the three stages (process, output, outcome) NFPs can be compared with other policy means (see Figure 2).

Ad Step 1: Influence of external factors on NFPs

In the Freiburg meeting, WG2 elaborated a list of “supportive and impeding factors” which were supposed to be evaluated with regard to their influence on “substantive NFPs”. This list contains the following items:

- Spain (autumn 2000) *political and social context*
- Scotland (spring 2001): *influence of legal regulations*
- Norway (autumn 2001): *financial framework and incentives*
- Finland (spring 2002): *advocacy coalitions, institutional aspects*
- Portugal (autumn 2002): *multilevel governance, land tenure*
- Austria (spring 2003): *[synthesis]*

In this planned procedure, in our opinion, the term “substantive NFPs” seems to be problematic. Trying to make a distinction between a substantive and a non-substantive (i.e. a symbolic) NFP would require a clear definition of what a NFP is. As mentioned in the minutes of the Freiburg meeting, the notion of NFPs is (still) more or less vague and unclear. Certainly there is a number of “political” documents which name the central elements of NFPs (e.g. the “basic principles” of FAO (1996) or the documents drawn up in the IPF/IFF process; see Egestad 1999) but, up to now, there is no politically agreed definition of what a NFP is (and most likely there will never be such a definition, given the variety of different contexts in the countries). This

⁵ Workplan 1999-2003; final draft, 21st March 2000

⁶ We want to mention at the outset that the COST Action probably will only manage to go into step 1 and step 2. Because of limited resources (esp. time) and lack of experience in the implementation of NFPs in most European countries step 3 can only be dealt with peripherally.

situation is aggravated by the fact that the politically defined elements are often formulated in a very elusive and equivocal way, i.e., the descriptions given are far from an operational definition.

This fact has far-reaching consequences for the (planned) activities of WG2. To get a reliable (dependent) variable (here: “substantive NFP”) one would have to know (a) the constituting factors (here: the “core elements” of a NFP), (b) their relative weights as well as (c) the functional connections between the elements (see Formula 1). Only when the *definitional* question is answered, i.e. the dependent variable (“substantive NFP”) is defined and operationalised in an adequate way, one can go on to ask the *analytical* question of which factors support or impede the formulation and implementation of such a NFP (see Formula 2).

Definition model: „What is a substantive NFP?“

$$\text{subst. NFP} =: a * \text{BP1} + b * \text{BP2} + c * \text{BP3} + d * \text{BP4} + \dots$$

Formula 1

- subst. NFP..... substantive NFP
- BP n..... basic principle n
- a, b, c ... weighting parameters

Explanation model: „What is the influence of external factors on a substantive NFP?“

$$\text{subst. NFP} = f(\text{F1}; \text{F2}; \text{F3} \dots)$$

Formula 2

- subst. NFP..... substantive NFP
- F n..... (supportive/impeding) factor n

As mentioned above, the policy process provides no adequate operationalisation of the definition model. In our opinion, it is also quite unrealistic that the scientists in WG2 can produce (negotiate, agree upon ...) such an unambiguous “definition formula”. We think that the model depicted in Figure 2 is more promising (see esp. the green box in the centre of the diagram). Here we do not use the “NFP as such” as the unit under measurement but we – with a look at the political (definition) process – first try to specify the “core elements” of a NFP. Following the categorisation in WG1 (see above), these elements could be the following: “participatory mechanisms“, “negotiation, collaboration, conflict resolution“, “intersectoral approaches“ and „long-term, iterative approaches“. Of course, this list of relevant core elements has to be clarified by WG2.

The analytical model depicted in Figure 2 (which, of course, is very simplistic) is based on the assumption that the “external factors” determine how a NFP looks like in a particular country (grey arrows). Our proposal differs from the initial approach (as described in Formula 2) particularly to the effect that the independent variables (i.e. the “supportive/impeding factors”; F1, F2, F3 ...) do not come in at the level of “NFPs as such” but at the level of the relevant *core elements of NFPs*. Thus a possible research question would no longer read as follows: “What is the influence of a certain kind of financial incentives on an NFP?” But the research question would read like this: “What is the influence of a certain kind of financial incentives on (a) the form of

participation, (b) the modes of collaboration, (c) the form of intersectoral co-ordination, (d) long-term, iterative planning approaches etc.?” The character of the core elements of a NFP and their interaction together characterise a NFP (process) (blue arrows or green rectangle respectively).⁷

Our decision not to utilise “NFPs as such” but their constituting elements to answer the question “Is it substantive or is it symbolic?” does NOT solve the problem of unclear (or even lacking) definition criteria. By splitting a NFP into its constituting elements we only shift the definition problem to another level. We no longer have to answer the question “What is a substantive NFP?” But the question now reads as follows: “What is (substantive) participation?”, “What is (substantive) intersectoral co-ordination?” etc.

These last-mentioned questions can be tackled in two ways (which we call Mode I and Mode II). The decision for one of these modes has far-reaching consequences in the subsequent research design. Figure 3 depicts the two modes by using the core element “participation” as an example:

- In the first case (Mode I in Figure 3) the relevant question still is: “Under what circumstances can a participation process be called »substantive«?” Possible indicators for answering this question could be: the number of actors involved (few or many), the time of involvement (late or early) and/or the degree of involvement (one-sided information – a hearing procedure – complete co-determination). This list, of course, could be supplemented or amended arbitrarily. Since, in the end, one once again has to decide whether the level of participation found in a certain country can be rated as “substantive” (or rather “symbolic”) the definition elements chosen have to be made commensurable (i.e. measurable and possible to aggregate). This means, that one has to specify a “definition model” (similar to Formula 1). The problems associated with this decision are – in principle – the same as those on the level of ‘NFPs as such’. Nevertheless, addressing the parametrisation problem on the level of core elements (and not ‘NFPs as such’) has the advantage that the evaluation question is more concrete. This could make it easier for a group of scientists to develop a list of relevant criteria and to weight these criteria. Undoubtedly, there are more theoretical approaches and more empirical case studies in the field of “participation” than in the field of “NFPs”.
- The second model (Mode II in Figure 3) is more modest insofar as the “substantiveness” of participation is no longer a relevant research question. Here the scientists’ task only consists in characterising “participation” by means of distinct features. In this Mode, WG2 would only have to search for important descriptive criteria which would NOT have to be made commensurable and “stuffed” into a definition model (similar to the one depicted in Formula 1). A research design of this kind would have the advantage that the group of scientists no longer has to take a normative decision. But it also has the disadvantage that here no straightforward reference value (which could be used in statistical correlation analyses) would be made available.

⁷ In order to keep Figure 2 legible, only the „paths of influence“ of the external factor „financial incentives“ are shown in detail. For all other factors the possible influences are symbolised as a frayed bundle of lines.

Figure 2: The Approach of Working Group 2

evaluation of the significance of NFPs
in comparison to other policy means ...

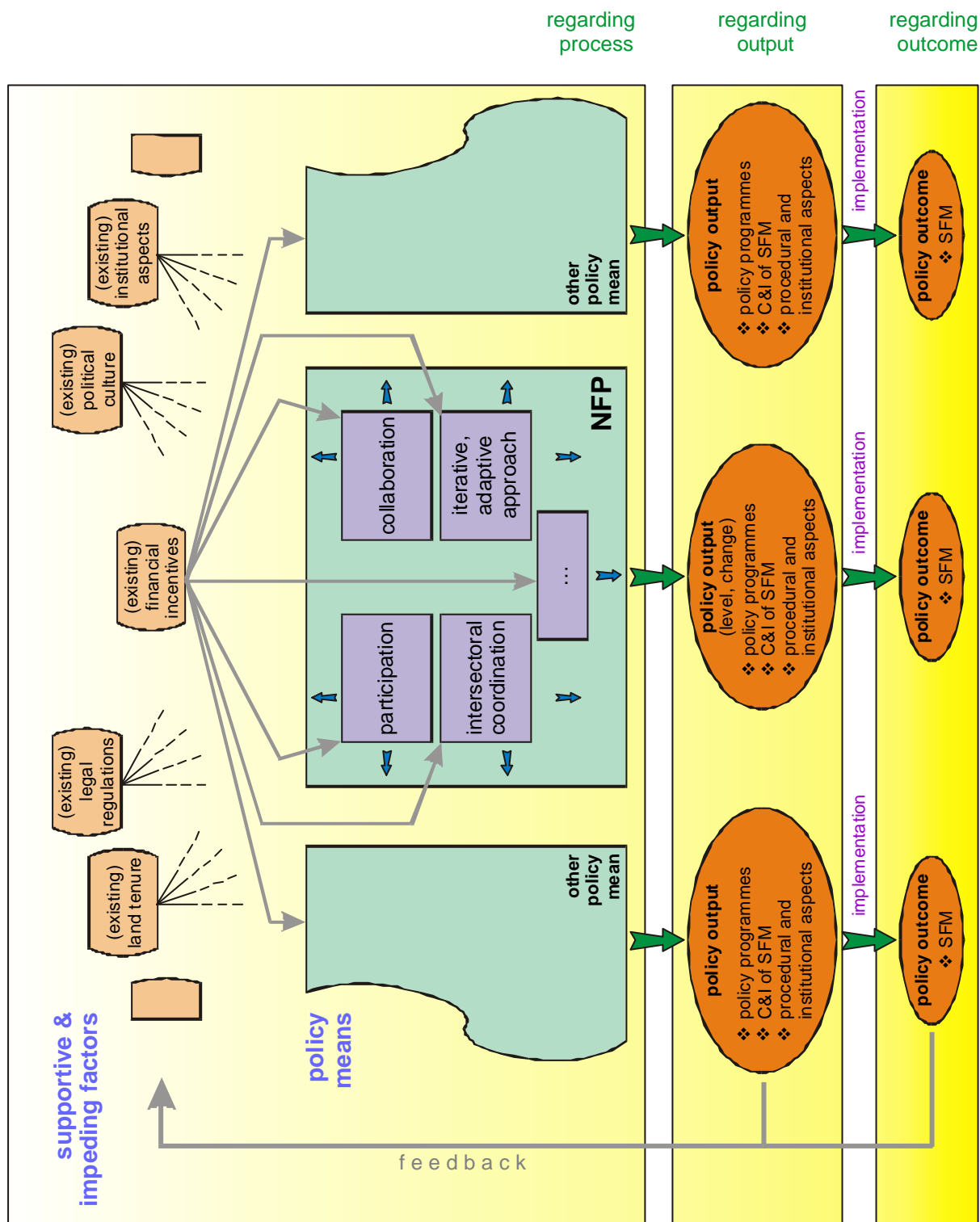
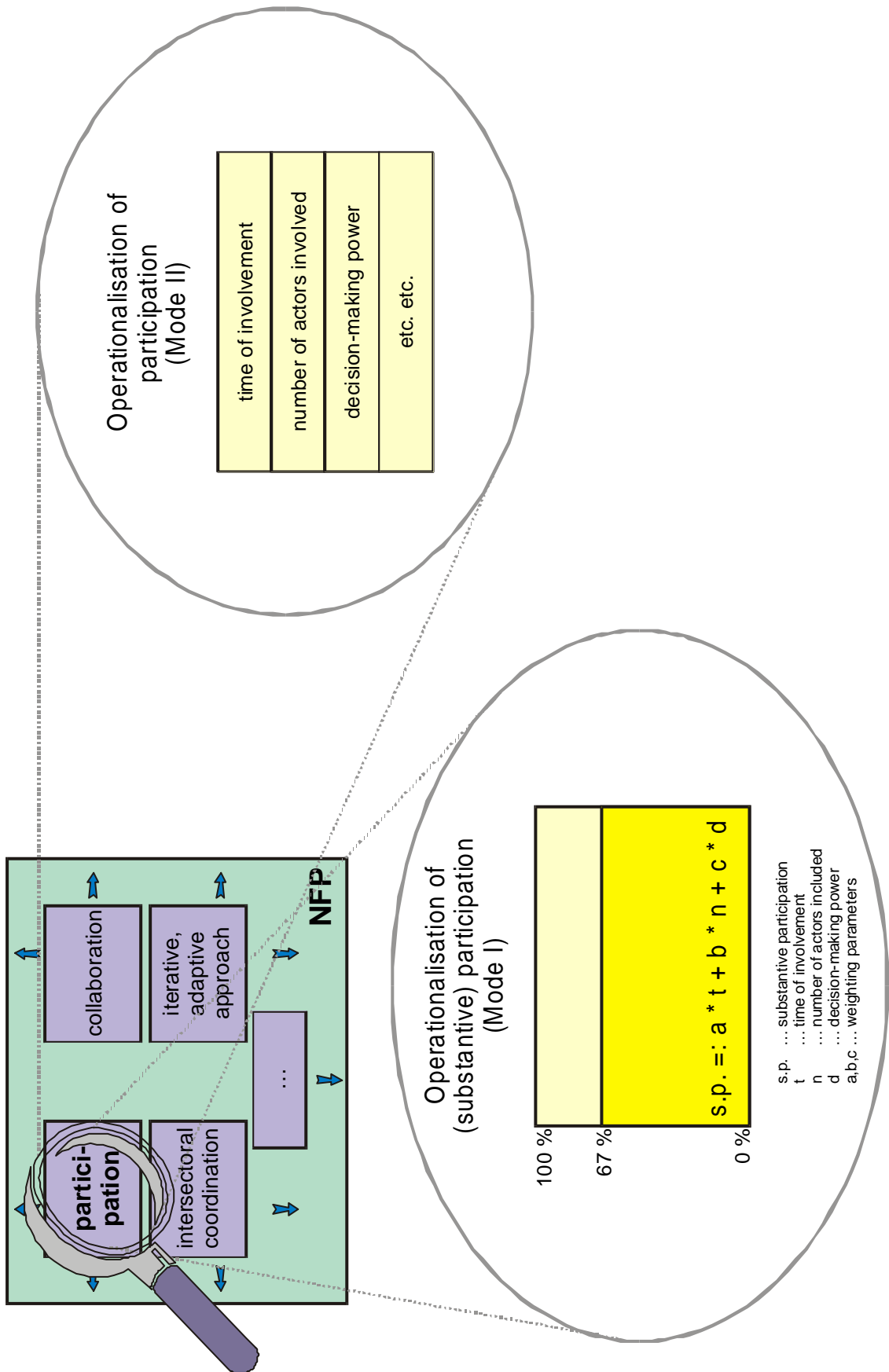


Figure 3: Two modes of operationalisation



Ad Steps 2 and 3: Policy outputs and outcomes of NFPs

In the end, NFPs will result in specific *policy outputs* (e.g. reformulation of programmes dealing with forests, modifications in subsidy schemes etc.) and – via implementation – in specific *policy outcomes*, i.e. impacts “in the forests” (see green arrow in the centre of Figure 2). For our purposes, “*policy outputs*” are meant to comprise (a) policy programmes (such as forest strategies, regulations, guidelines etc.), (b) criteria and indicators (C&I) of SFM⁸, and (c) procedural and institutional aspects (e.g. changes in the procedures for defining the targets of forest subsidy schemes, the budgeting and distribution of funds or the distribution of power in forest policy actor networks; see Figure 2).

The question whether NFP processes are “significant” or not, i. e. whether “they make a difference”, can only be answered by looking at the policy outputs or, finally, at the policy outcomes. We assume that hardly any country in the COST Action E19 (maybe except for Finland) has experiences with the implementation of NFPs. With that, WG2 will have to fall back on experiences gained in the implementation of other programmes⁹ as well as on hypotheses on implementation and policy outcomes coming from political theory in general. Beyond that, the evaluation will have to be narrowed down to policy outputs (Step 2).

In our discussions we also came to the conclusion that the evaluation of the significance of policy outputs cannot be restricted to *policy change* (as determined by a comparison of the situation *before* a NFP was formulated/implemented and the situation *afterwards*). What is also needed in the evaluation is the *baseline*, i.e. the level at which a NFP process started. From this perspective, a substantive NFP process does not necessarily have to lead to new programmes, procedures or institutions, it can also integrate existing elements or it can “only” be used as a new label for an existing programme.

The second main task of WG2 is „to evaluate the significance of NFPs in comparison to other policy means” (see above). Also for this comparison of NFPs with other instruments an “evaluation” of policy outputs is needed¹⁰.

The evaluation of outputs (and, of course, outcomes) also is supposed to result in measurement problems (similar to the ones described above). To assess whether an

⁸ In the Freiburg meeting, WG2 agreed that a clear and meaningful definition of “sustainable forest management” (SFM) should be one of the central constituting elements of NFPs. According to that, a “substantive NFP” would not only be defined by procedural criteria (such as participation, intersectoral co-ordination, iterative planning approaches etc.) but would also fulfil minimum requirements as regards content (C&I of SFM).

In this paper we do *not* adhere to this point of view. For us the definition of SFM (by means of C&I) is no longer a constituting part of NFPs. Although the definition of SFM by means of C&I can be seen as the operationalisation of the politically postulated goal of NFPs, in our analytical design the definition of SFM is one of the *outputs* of a NFP.

⁹ “Why and how should the outputs of NFPs differ from the outputs of other programmes?”

¹⁰ The formulation and implementation of these “other policy means” also depends on so-called “*external factors*” (as indicated by the grey arrows on the right and on the left in Figure 2). In our research design, the influence of external factors on “other policy means” will not be analysed. This alternative instruments are also supposed to lead to specific *outputs* and *outcomes* (green arrows on the left and on the right).

output is “substantive” or not an operational standard of comparison is needed. If one follows Mode I (see Figure 3) a definition model for “substantive policy outputs of NFPs” is needed. Once again, the political process does not provide a sufficiently concrete operationalisation and we cannot expect the members of WG2 to reach agreement on a common “definition formula” (similar to Formula 1 above).

The second alternative is to use a Mode II approach (see Figure 3). The Pan-European C&I of SFM could provide a possible frame of reference for the evaluation of policy outputs. Here, it would make sense to use the more operational indicators instead of the rather vague criteria. But the Pan-European C&I of SFM supply a frame of reference only for part of the possible outputs of NFPs. Institutional and procedural aspects are more or less neglected in the C&I. Therefore, in the analysis of many policy outputs we have to be satisfied with “mere” descriptions.

Last but not least, we want to emphasise the dualistic character of policy outputs and policy outcomes. While policy outputs are regarded as dependent variables in Step 2 of our conceptual framework, these outputs can also have an effect on the “external factors” (see the feedback mechanisms in Figure 2). With this the policy output of period 1 can become an explanatory variable for Step 1 in period 2. The same logic applies to policy outcomes which are the dependent variable in Step 3.

4 Considering the Co-ordination of the Working Groups

The comparison of the work-programmes of the two Working Groups shows, that the sequences of dealing with the “core elements” are different: While WG1 in every meeting deals with theories and experiences related to one “core element”, WG2 will examine the influence of “one external factor” on all the core elements.¹¹ That is, WG2 necessarily will have to deal some with core elements before WG1 will be able to provide the respective results; only after the meeting in Scotland the results of WG1 on participation will be available, but WG2 plans to examine the influence of legal regulation on all core elements there. According to the present WG1-workplan results on all the core elements will not be available before the last meeting (Vienna; synthesis of previous results).

What does this mean with regard to inter-group co-ordination? It seems necessary that WG2 develops ways to deal with the “core elements”, i.e. some conceptions on their meaning (“characterisation”) before or at the Aberdeen meeting, at the latest. As far as step 1 of the WG2-design is concerned, they are the “dependent variables”.¹² One way to solve this problem, could be to develop typologies. Different types of participation, for example, could be distinguished based on the number of actors involved, the distribution of decision-making power and the time of involvement (cf. Mode II in Figure 3).

If one applies the conceptions discussed in this paper, it would be certainly reasonable to take the typologies used in WG2 into account in the course of WG1-

¹¹ See step 1 of the proposed WG2- design.

¹² The research question of the Aberdeen-meeting corresponding to step 1 reads as follows: „*What is the influence of legal regulations on participatory mechanisms, on intersectoral approaches, on collaborative approaches and on long term, interactive processes?*“ According to step 2 and 3 of the proposed WG2-design the question is „*what are the consequences of that as regards policy outputs as well as policy outcomes?*“

examinations. If WG1 does not do so, the two working groups will finally not be able to combine their results at the best possible rate and fail to take full advantage of each others work. Furthermore: WG1 will be able to provide detailed results to one core elements after every meeting. Then, WG2 could/should use these results to reflect on its conception/typology for the respective element and, if appropriate, to revise its typology for the next meeting where the influence of another external factor will be discussed.

As regards policy outputs (and policy outcomes; see Step 2 and 3, Figure 2) the proposed approaches imply that both Working Groups will yield results at every meeting: WG1 would proceed from theories and experiences on one core element, whereas WG2 would start from specific supporting and/or impeding factors and ask for their influence on policy outputs/outcomes (in the sense of policy programmes, C&I of SFM as well as procedural and institutional aspects). Therefore, from our perspective, the Working Group meetings should be followed and supplemented by a panel-session at every meeting. Such panel-sessions would provide the opportunity to report about and discuss the WG-result on policy outputs and policy outcomes respectively, thereby taking advantage of possible synergies as far as possible.

Vienna, November 2000