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Purposes and Challenges of Collaborative Forest Planning

Leena A. Leskinen

Finnish Forest Research Institute, Joensuu Research Unit

1 Background: Communicative rationality

According to e.g. Iyer-Raniga and Treloar (2000) the sustainable management of the natural resources requires proactive involvement by the public. Public participation as a communicative process helps decision makers better understand the knowledge possessed by and the values of the participants, or allows the stakeholders to directly influence planning and decision-making (e.g. Leskinen 2004a).

One step forward from compromise is collaboration. Basically in this paper, it is assumed that communicative rationality and collaboration can be achieved by a communicative action. The challenge of the communicative process is that stakeholders have different perspectives. The process to overcome misunderstandings regarding different perspectives can be explained by Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1987, see also Leskinen 2004a).

In the communicative action theory, individuals have different perspectives and see things differently because words, phrases, expressions and objects are interpreted differently according to their frame of reference (Healey 1992). Knowledge is broadly understood as knowledge of cause and effect, moral values and aesthetic worlds. "Aesthetic worlds" means that each individual's experience based interpretations concerning the planning situation is valid. Everyone has an equivalent standing: there is no criteria available for distinguishing one person's interpretation from another's. This situation does not end in chaos, because an individual's ideas about themselves, interests and values are socially constructed through communication with others and the collaborative work this involves. Individuals are engaged with others in diverse, fluid and overlapping "discourse communities" (Healey 1992, see also Leskinen 2004a).

The role of communicative action is to develop understandings and practices of inter-discursive communication, that is, understanding of different perspectives. Interaction involves respectful discussion within and between discourse communities. Thus, the knowledge of moral values includes communication concerning the value of the local environment, the benefits of the planning, and the positive and negative results of the implemented plan. Communication among stakeholders changes individual preferences and creates shared moral values (Healey 1995). Knowledge is

not pre-formulated, but is created by social process and the aim is to move from zero-sum solutions to win-win resolutions (Healey 1992, Healey 1995).

Finally, the knowledge of cause and effect includes technical knowledge and instrumental rationality to formulate and implement the plan that meets the requirements defined in communicative process (Healey 1992). Thus the result of communicative process is a implementation plan, that meets the requirements of communicative rationality and supports collaboration among participants.

2 How to apply the theory in practice?

Communicative action and rationality cannot be reached intentionally. Planners cannot force stakeholders to collaborate, respect or trust each other. However, many studies indicate that learning, relationship building, sharing knowledge and interest representation are the dimensions of successful public participation (see Leskinen 2004a). If successful, these dimensions may result in participants creating common knowledge during the process of communicating among different discourse communities and thereby achieving consensus.

The key factor in promoting communication is including the proper procedures in planning, e.g. by facilitation of collaborative process, and sound argumentation, building trust and transparency into the planning process Leskinen 2004b).

How do we know, if the result of the planning process is consensus, compromise or manipulation? Evaluation or research can be conducted by surveys, observations, interviews and case studies (Leskinen 2004a and b). However, the challenge is to prove that communicative action and knowledge creating processes *per se* have occurred. The participants' perceptions may address it – or they may have been manipulated during the process. At best, it can be shown that there were adequate possibilities for communication during the planning procedure. Some other criteria of collaborative planning can be addressed as: innovations and dispute resolutions that are indicators of the collaborative processes (Leskinen 2004b). In practice this means that as a result of the planning process:

1. Problems are resolved (win-win resolutions).
2. Something new is created: new practices arise.

3 Results from some empirical cases

3.1 Regional Forest Programme process (Leskinen 2004a)

The case introduces communicative participation process, used by the Regional Forest Programme 1998-2002 for the Ostrobothnia region of the Coastal Forestry Centre in Finland. The following stakeholders participated in the programme formulation process: the Regional Environmental Agency, the Regional Employment and Economic Development Centre, the forest industries and the forest owner organisations (see more Leskinen 2004a).The working group meetings during the Regional Forest Programme process offered an arena for communication and understanding of the discourse communities' different perspectives. In principle, consensus-reaching communication was possible. According to the stakeholders, in the current case compromises were

reached. This conclusion is also supported by noting that no resolution was created, because the conflict concerning biodiversity conservation continued at the national policy level.

3.2 Wood energy project run by Southern Ostrobonia Forestry Centre (Leskinen 2006)

The case introduces collaboration that emerged to solve the problem of early thinnings in the Southern Ostrobothnia Forestry Centre. In the implementationa area, the difference between the necessary thinning of saplings and the actual thinning was almost 6,000 ha per year and the difference for necessary pre-commercial harvesting and actual area harvested was approximately 9,000 ha per year. At least partly, this discrepancy is caused by the forest industries preferring not to purchase small diameter wood from young forests.

A wood energy project run by the Forestry Centre facilitated the establishment of a small heating business producing energy from small diameter wood. The main efforts entailed in the project were promoting the idea of wood energy and facilitating the decision-making processes of energy consumers (e.g. local authorities) and suppliers (i.e. forest owners). The wood energy project aimed to be a facilitator for the collaboration among forest owners. An entrepreneurship advisor introduced the local forest owners to the idea of energy wood for heat generation, in order to find entrepreneurs interested in forming co-operative for a small heating business.

Wood energy projects also promote early thinnings by creating new markets for small-diameter wood. The practical outputs at the local level were an increase in area of young forest management, increased rural entrepreneurship and employment. This case meets two criteria on collaboration: the problem of the early thinnings was (partly) solved and a new practice, forest owners co-operatives, was created.

4 Concluding remarks

Sustainable forest management requires that human practices and natural conditions are integrated so that ecosystems are healthy and local communities are provided with income and welfare (e.g. Haila 1998a, Haila 1998b, see also Leskinen 2004a). According to Iyer-Ranica and Treloar (2000), the evolutionary nature of both ecological and social components must be recognised in the context of sustainable development. Ecological and social changes are not managed by simple instructions, but instead by creating and promoting social practices and structures supporting sustainable forest management. Social structures are institutions (e.g. legislation), rules (e.g. forest management recommendations), customs and habits (Haila 1998a). Social structures are important because they constrain the use of nature and define social practices that is, how people manage forests. The present study supports the theory that if public participation facilitates collaboration, it has the possibility of creating preferred social practices (Iyer-Ranica and Treloar 2000, Leskinen 2004a and b, Leskinen 2006).

However, the challenge is to demonstrate that adequate possibilities for collaboration have occurred in particular planning case. The win-win resolutions of problems and new social practices are promising indicators that collaboration has indeed occurred. The conditions and connections of collaboration and sustainable forest management practices need further research. This can be conducted through case studies (Yin 1994, Flyvbjerg 2001).

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