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Long-Term Harmony? Reflections on Policy Change Governance in Sustainable Management of Natural Resources through Participatory Processes

Metodi Sotirov

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Authors' affiliation:

Institute of Forest and Environmental Policy
Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg
Tennenbacher Str. 4
D-79106 Freiburg, Germany
Tel: 0049 (0) 761 203 37 19
Fax: 0049 (0) 761 203 37 05
E-Mail: metodi.sotirov@ifp.uni-freiburg.de

Abstract

Since the UNCED in 1992 and as a result of subsequent meetings within the global forest dialogue, the paradigm of sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of forests (SFM) has been introduced and promoted as a new long-term policy commitment in the Global Environmental Policy. In the wake of major efforts of policy-making at various levels worldwide, National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been suggested as an appropriate participatory planning instrument to translate and safeguard the SFM at national and sub-national level by highlighting social and ecological priorities. Furthermore, NFPs are seen as means to improve the convergence of short-term political choices and long-term orientation of policy measures, and to coordinate the policy actors through democratic action principles such as participation, decentralisation, holistic and cross-sectoral orientation. Thus, the NFPs are deemed to be promising new participatory governance instruments with potential to contribute to substantial change in the existing policies relevant to natural resource management.

Despite the plenty of theoretical and empirical findings on NFPs in European context, little knowledge exists to date, however, whether a *substantial* NFP is a sufficient for *substantial* or *major* policy change towards SFM. Based on the state-of-the-art of participatory governance processes on forest and environmental policy in Europe, this paper deals with the question of whether the involvement of stakeholders in the formulation of policy dealing with potentially conflicting issues, like SFM, is efficient for policy change and if not, what the underlying constraints are. The essay draws particularly on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as an actors-based theoretical concept of policy change, and a case study from Bulgaria as a consolidating democracy. The paper argues that a substantial participatory NFP was insufficient for substantial policy change because of actors' behaviour based on a composition of normative beliefs, self-interests, and power constellations.

1. Introduction

Since the UNCED in 1992, and as a result of its follow-up within the global forest dialogue (IFF, IFP, UNFF), the paradigm of sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of forests (SFM) has been introduced and promoted as a new long-term policy commitment in the global environmental policy. In the wake of major efforts of expert work and policy-makers negotiations at various levels worldwide, National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been suggested as an appropriate participatory planning instrument to translate and safeguard the SFM at national and sub-national level by highlighting social and ecological priorities, and thus contributing to substantial change in the existing policies relevant to natural resource management. Furthermore, NFPs are seen as means to improve the coherency of short-term political choices and long-term orientation of policy measures, and to coordinate the policy actors through democratic action principles such as participation, decentralisation, holistic and cross-sectoral orientation (Glück, 1999).

Although there has been recently made major theoretical and empirical investigation on success stories and influencing factors into development of NFPs processes in European context, little empirical research has been done to analyse, however, whether a *substantial* NFP is a sufficient for *substantial* or *major* policy change towards SFM.

Therefore, this study tries to complement further the findings from the recent research on NFPs and clarifies what role participatory NFPs do have in forest policy reform processes. More concrete, this paper deals with the question of whether the involvement of stakeholders in the discussion of policy dealing with potentially conflicting issues, like SFM, is efficient for policy change and if not, what the underlying constraints are? This research does not claim any perfect general validity of its findings as they are produced in a specific national context, but it does hope to contribute to filling this knowledge gap.

I proceed firstly by reviewing the literature on National Forest Programmes as it relates to the aim of this study. Secondly, I present a research design to evaluate substantive NFP process as a driver for substantive policy change and conclude by discussing the theoretical and empirical findings.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sustainable forest management and Global Forest Regime

In view of the urgency of the environmental threat over the forests worldwide, most notably in developing countries and countries with emerging markets, in regard to their area distribution, structural and species' diversity, and health condition, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) set in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro the milestone for an international forest policy. During the Rio-Conference the actors involved agreed however merely on non-binding policy outputs according to international law, namely Statement on Forest Principles and Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 on „Combating the deforestation“, as means to tackle the emerging challenges in forest use and conservation. The concept of sustainable use, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests, in short sustainable forest management (SFM), is a central element of these policy outputs. Indeed, the SFM concept claims for balance of the environmental, economic, social and cultural interests in forests worldwide.

Following the Earth Summit, the UN established the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), to implement the above mentioned “soft-law” agreements. From 1995 to 2000, the IPF/IFF processes dealt with such issues as i) underlying causes of deforestation, ii) traditional forest-related knowledge,

iii) international cooperation in financial assistance and technology transfer, iv) development of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, v) and trade and environment. The IPF/IFF processes resulted in a set of 290 proposals for action for the promotion of SFM (Pülzl & Rametsteiner 2002: 260). In 2000, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) with the main objective to promote the SFM and to strengthen long-term political commitment based on the Rio Declaration, the Forest Principles, Chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the outcome of the IPF/IFF Processes and other key milestones of international forest policy. At Pan-European level, the Ministerial Process on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) as an intergovernmental regional initiative is of particular importance for the development of a common understanding in regard to protection and sustainable management of European forests (Mayer 1999: 181).

The mentioned international cooperation efforts on SFM constitute the Global Forest Regime (Glück 1994: 85, Weber 2003: 28) and can be seen as changed mode of natural resource governance from hierarchical to heterarchical one (Pülzl & Rametsteiner 2002: 262). As the actual understanding of SFM is based upon broadened definition moving from the traditional sustained yield concept towards multiple-use forestry or even ecosystem forest management as laid down in UNCED Forest Principles and Helsinki Resolution H1 (Castenada (2000: 34), Glück (1994), Glück & Humphreys (2002: 254), Volz (2003: 63), Weiss (2002: 217), a paradigm shift in forest policy has been observed. Indeed, this new shared understanding of SFM highlights forestry sustainability and welfare role of forests as key defining characteristics for the forest policy (Humphreys 2004: 41). Hence, since the UNCED in 1992 and its follow-up within the global forest dialogue, the paradigm of the expanded understanding of SFM has been introduced and promoted as a new long-term policy commitment in the global environmental policy.

2. 2. National Forest Programmes in European context

In the wake of major efforts of expert work and policy-makers negotiations at various levels worldwide, most notably at global level at the Rio-Conference and within its follow-up on global forest dialogue, National Forest Programmes (NFPs) have been developed and suggested as an appropriate political planning instrument to translate the international commitments for achieving SFM at national and sub-national level (Glück 1999: 41, Glück et al., 2004: 2, MCPFE 2003: 1-3, Pülzl & Rametsteiner 2002: 260). MCPFE and the European Union in its EU Forest Strategy 1998 and EU Forest Action Plan 2006 also emphasise, inter alia, the National Forest Programmes (NFPs) as an appropriate means for implementation of the commitments and principles of the international forest dialogue on SFM.

In this context, NFPs are also based upon above-mentioned new shared and expanded understanding of SFM. Furthermore, NFPs are seen as new framework of policy planning to improve the convergence of short-term political choices and long-term orientation of policies, and to coordinate the policy actors through democratic action principles such as participation, decentralisation, holistic and cross-sectoral orientation (Glück 1999: 42-43). In this regard NFPs are considered as “original assemblage of policy tools” with a new potential of synergies and innovations that may lead to long-term attainment of SFM (Humphreys 2004: 42). Thus, NFPs are seen as promising tools to resolve conflicting economic, ecological and social interests in forests in developed and developing world (Glück & Humphreys, 2002: 254, Glück et al. 2004: 1).

In order to analyse the potentials of NFPs to work in practice in European context, a four-year research programme under COST Action E19 was set up from 1999-2004 and that more than 70 researchers from various interdisciplinary research fields contributed to (Glück &

Humphreys 2002: 253, for further details on authors' contributions see Glück et al. 2004). After completion of this major research cooperation analysing by its time more than 17 European countries including almost all of EU member states (EU-15), EU acceding countries (Hungary, Lithuania, Poland) and EFTA member states (Norway, Switzerland), the GoFor research project on "New Modes of Governance for Sustainable Forestry in Europe" was launched in 2004 with EU financial support with the main aim "to evaluate evolving practices of new modes of governance as a basis for policy relevant conclusions and recommendations in order to safeguard sustainable forest management in Europe.". In this framework several case studies are dedicated also to evaluation of NFPs processes (see project internet site for more details on partners and case studies: <http://www.boku.ac.at/GoFOR/>).

Further process-oriented analysis on NFPs has been initiated and meantime accomplished through single project driven studies on Bulgaria (Ratarova 2004), Germany (Elsasser 2007), Kyrgystan (Kouplevatskaya-Yunusova & Buttoud 2006), Spain (Domingues & Tena 2006), Switzerland (Zingerli & Zimmermann 2006), and others.

These major research efforts have so far produced enormous theoretically sound propositions and empirically based findings on NFPs processes in a European context. Yet, one can use the four basic principles such as i) public participation, ii) holistic and intersectoral co-ordination, iii) decentralisation and iv) long term, iterative and adaptive planning with their defining characteristic to critically delineate national forest policy processes as a National Forest Programme (Glück & Humphreys 2002: 255) and assess whether it is of substantive or of symbolic nature (Schanz 1999: 239-240, Glück 1999: 47-48). Following the findings revealed by the mentioned research projects a substantive NFP may be defined as one that to significant extent accommodates the four basic principles mentioned above (Glück & Humphreys 2002: 257) and one that aspires at significant change of existing policies, while a symbolic NFP merely supports and legitimises the status quo (Glück 2004: 13; Humphreys, 2004: 19). Schanz defines further a substantial approach of NFPs the one that institutionalises a continuous discursive stakeholders' forum in line with a communicative mode of rationality (Schanz 2002: 273) and not necessarily produces a plan or another "product" (Schanz 2000: 17) typical for the traditional and most dominated in Europe mode of instrumental rationality (Schanz: 2002: 276). In this regard the NFP notion of participation is very much coherent with the model of participation as a goal as deliberative approach (Shannon 2004) and but less in line with the participation as means based on rationalist approach (Humphreys, 2004: 32). In this context the role of participation becomes central to the concept of NFPs as it seen not just as a means, but rather as a model for involving the concerned stakeholders in order to understand better their often conflicting objectives, to find appropriate balance between them, and by that way to achieve sustainable development through democracy of "consensus in diversity" (Applestrand 2002).

In regard to the participatory nature of NFPs Elsasser concludes, however, that participatory NFPs illustrate a challenging exercise because of the incoherency between the need for substantive agreements under the rule of unanimity in consensus making and the increasing number of participating stakeholders with often conflicting positions (Elsasser 2002:299), or due to the fundamental democratic legitimisation deficit of stakeholders involved towards population representation (Elsasser 2007: 1028). On the other hand, participation could moreover set the fundamentals for social discourse on SFM where the participation of competing positions might be the main task (Elsasser 2007) and the NFPs could be organised as "discursive institutions" to institutionalise the continuous stakeholders' dialogue process in order to identify, accommodate and address different normative perspectives of SFM (Schanz 2002). Furthermore Shannon suggests even a "constructing" analytic-deliberative or social

process as integrative constructivist model for policy formulation and decisions that unites the rational and communicative policy models, and is to generate endogenous to the NFPs information/knowledge and interests as main substantial goal (Shannon 2004: 58-61).

Finally, scholars are already provided with tools for analysis or even prediction of success or failure of NFP's processes by looking at external factors such as i) political culture, ii) legal aspects, iii) financial incentives, iv) advocacy coalitions, v) institutional arrangements, vi) multilevel governance and vii) land tenure which could have supporting or impeding impact in terms of substance depending on the national context (Humphreys, 2004: 19).

2.3. National Forest Programmes and Policy Change

As described above, NFP constitutes a participatory planning instrument which promotes new mode of governance of natural resources departing from the traditional command-and-control and top-down models of decision making dominated solely by the government institutions. Indeed, it strives for empowerment of other non-governmental actors to take part in the policy process and seeks to coordinate the conflicting interests (Glück & Humphreys, 2002: 253). Thus, the formulation and implementation of a NFP process at national level call for policy change towards SFM (Glück 1999: 47).

Further research has already shown that the interaction between NFPs as planning instrument and the rule of law as legal basis for implementation of any democratic choice increases at the moment when NFPs are to bring substantive policy change affecting institutional, strategic or instrumental aspects, and thus imply legal amendments. In such cases, the legal norms could theoretically accommodate the formal and material elements of NFPs, however disharmony between these two policy instruments is more likely to occur in practise (Zimmermann 2004: 152-153). Finally, empirical results show that it is possible to launch and develop a NFP or similar regional planning processes without any legal basis. In turn, the very same participatory processes could stimulate and lead to legal changes at later stages as the Finish case shows (Saastamoinen 2004, Ollonqvist 2004).

However, the scientific knowledge to date refers to the fact that the success of NFPs depends heavily on the political culture in a given country. For instance where there is a power asymmetry between participating actors and policy legacies NFP will not develop at all as this the case is in Greece (Papageorgiou & Vakrou 2004) and France (Buttoud 2004), or it will be of purely symbolic nature because of neo-corporatist policy making style with limited access to outsiders and no readiness for any change by the dominant insiders of the policy subsystem actors like in Austria (Voitleithner 2002). On the other hand, recent studies (Glück et al. 2005: 59) consider internal to the process aspects such as political commitment by the decision-makers and external one such as legally binding embodiment for institutionalisation of a continuous iterative process to be the general supporting factors for NFPs.

Despite the above-mentioned plenty of theoretical and empirical findings on NFPs in European context, little knowledge exists to date, however, whether a *substantial* NFP is a sufficient for *substantial* or *major* policy change towards SFM. Thus, the present study may be considered as an attempt to give some meaningful answers to “[...] the questions of whether and how policy networks are capable of including and facilitating policy choices across a range of stakeholders with diverse interests, and whether and how substantial change can take place in the face of strongly opposed values and interests.” (Glück et al. 2005: 54)

Indeed, a recent relevant study based on qualitative social research revealed that the Bulgarian process of formulating of NFP was basically developed in accordance with the MCPFE

principles such as public participation, holistic and intersectoral co-ordination, and iterative process with long-term commitment (Ratarova 2004). Thus, one can conclude that Bulgarian NFPs was of substantive nature according to the premises presented above. As the findings from the case study presented below show that a substantive participatory NFP was insufficient to generate substantial policy change towards SFM, as theoretically proposed, the question of understanding the constraints associated with this phenomenon remains still open.

Before trying to shed light on above-mentioned question, the paper firstly gives some insights into the general context of the Bulgarian participatory forest policy process from 2002 to date. Secondly, the paper presents a research design and empirical results to trace and understand the policy-making process on SFM. Lastly, the essay concludes with some valuable findings on the research question set before.

3. Background of the study: National Forest Programme in a national context - the Bulgarian case

After the political and economic turn in 1989, Bulgaria has undergone so far major transformations from centrally planned economy and communist form of government towards democratisation and establishment of market economy. Yet, Bulgaria is a full member of the European Union with parliamentary democracy and acknowledged developed market economy. Over the transformation period the Bulgarian forest sector has been also changed to significant extent. In 1997-2001, forest land ownership was returned to former non-state owners (individuals, communes, religious and private entities etc.) as per pre-communist period, forest management operations (e.g. timber harvesting, timber trade, silviculture, planning etc.) in state-owned forests, and state assets were to large extent privatised, and the control and operation functions of state forest service were also separated. However, after these major transformations the state, respectively the State forest service remained the largest forest owner over 80% of Bulgaria's forests, whereas 10% of the forest area were allotted to corporate forest owners and 10% to private ones. Even so, with some few exceptions the non-state owned forests are rather small-sized and largely fragmented. Furthermore, after the far-reaching privatisations of late 90s more than 2.500 forest-based entrepreneurs and diverse private holdings have emerged and have been using the forest resources, primarily in the state-owned forests.

In the period 2001-2005 many forest policy change initiatives were formulated based on perceived unsatisfying or even counterproductive outcomes of the previous forest reforms on SFM associated with challenges like insufficient finances, forest maintenance shortages, illegal practises and corruption, over-harvesting, forest fires etc. Indeed, in 2002 a major forest sector development project with the support of the World Bank and other donors was initiated by the Government of Bulgaria with the aim to promote SFM through diverse measures such as anew restructuring of state forest service, promotion of nature protection and sustainable forest management goals, and support to non-state forest owners. However, the policy core of the “new” forest reform proposal aimed at strengthening the commercial and public goods functions of the state through restructuring the National Forest Service and establishment of a State forest enterprise in particular.

At call of the donors, the above mentioned forestry rehabilitation project implementation should be based on a National Forest Strategy mutually agreed by all stakeholders concerned. Indeed, an output of that ilk, the National Forest Policy and Strategy on “Sustainable Development of the Bulgarian Forest Sector, 2003-2012” (NFPS), was formulated in 2002-2003 in a participatory process through the involvement of and in consensus among all important stakeholders, and was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2003.

However, the NFPS could not be mandatory agreed on in the Bulgarian Parliament during the severe conflicts between actors of state institutions, private business, nature protection and science on forest reform dimensions existed in parallel in the period 2003-2005 within the controversy on State forestry company (Memmler & Sotirov forthcoming). Thereby, the further implementation of forest reform through WB-project and respectively NFPS was put on hold.

Indeed, since the changes in the government in 2005 a plenty of policy options for new forest policy reforms have been proposed. Even more, the “old” NFPS from 2003 was “updated” in early 2006, and a Sustainable Forest Action Plan was also formulated in late 2006 under the leadership of the State Forest Service and in consultation with the stakeholders. Again, despite the new reform efforts and the recently structural spin-off of the State Forest Service from the Ministry of Agriculture, based on Government decision from midyear 2007, no major policy change in form and content towards SFM has been implemented to date.

Therefore, in the following I will try to answer the question set before of whether the involvement of stakeholders in the discussion of policy dealing with potentially conflicting issues, like SFM, is efficient for policy change and if not, what the underlying constraints are?

4. Research design

To better address the knowledge gap on the linkage between substantial participatory NFP and substantial policy change, the following research questions were identified:

- i) Who are the policy actors, involved in Bulgaria’s forest policy domain?
- ii) What kind of policy problems and solutions do actors perceive in regard to SFM?
- iii) What role do new forest policy means (e.g. participatory National Forest Programme) have in policy change towards SFM?

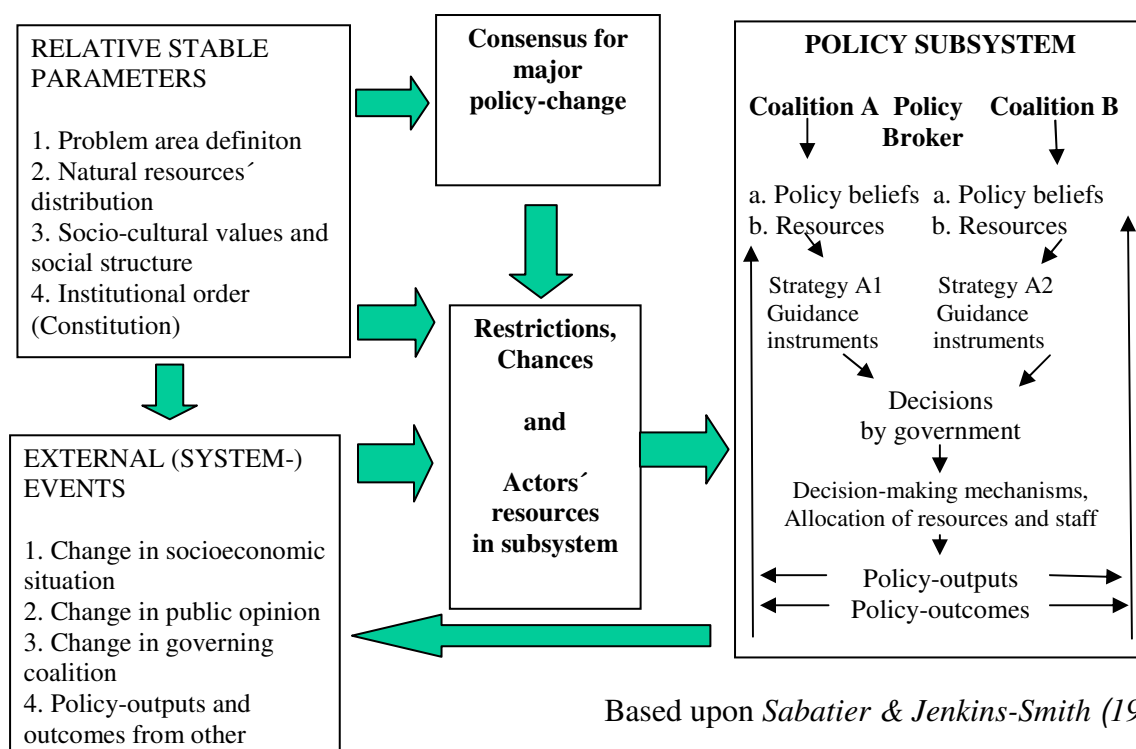
To answer the above formulated research questions, an actor-based approach of policy analysis was selected to study the process of NFPs development in regard to policy change at national level. The essay drew particularly on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as the most prominent actors-based theoretical framework of policy change and policy process to date, developed by Sabatier and colleagues (Sabatier 1988, Sabatier 1993, Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999, Sabatier & Weible 2007). The reasons for using it are described as follows.

Indeed, ACF is recognised by policy scholars as promising approach for conducting stakeholder analysis (Weible 2006). It broadens the analytical scope away from a single event or venue by screening the whole policy-making processes at the policy subsystem level for mid- to long-term periods of investigation (e.g. decade or more). The basic elements and variables of ACF are presented in **figure 1**. Basically, it constitutes a two-filter model, where the first filter is represented by relatively stable system parameters and external system-wide events which influence actors’ opportunities and actions. The second filter is characterised by actors and their perception-biased interactions in a given subsystem at all levels of government.

According to the framework, a given policy subsystem is made up of several, in most case of two to three advocacy coalitions. Each of them is assumed to be composed of actors grouped around shared policy core beliefs and coordinated actions. Indeed, stakeholders are actively concerned to influence the policy formulation and implementation in the subsystem according to their hierarchially organised belief systems of core, policy core, and secondary aspects. Especially, stakeholder coalitions seek to translate their objectives in their respective

policy cores into policy. In doing so, coalitions filter out dissonant information and choose to employ resources to influence policymaking venues (e.g. legislatures, administrative agencies, courts) based on attaining the most policy benefits per incurred costs. The resources or guidance instruments at their disposal could be: “a) influencing legislatures to alter budgets or legal authority of agencies through testimony and campaigns b) change of incumbent at various strategic positions c) affecting the public opinion d) demonstrations or boycotts, e) altering the perception of actors through research and information exchange.” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999: 142)

Fig. 1: Advocacy Coalition Framework



According to ACF, policy change in a given policy subsystem can only occur in result of

- 1) “external or internal (shocks) perturbations” (e.g. changes in socioeconomic conditions, public opinion and systemic government coalition, impacts of external policy decisions) *and* skilful exploitation by advocacy coalition, or
- 2) through “policy oriented learning” across competing advocacy stakeholder coalitions (Sabatier 1993, Sabatier-Jenkins-Smith 1999).

Moreover, the ACF provides further a clear-cut definition between major (substantial) and minor policy change: the former refers to changes of governmental programme in policy core beliefs, whereas the latter is solely reflected in changes in secondary aspects (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999, Sabatier & Weible 2007). Based on the theoretical construction of ACF, it may be assumed “[...] that, although policy-oriented learning often alters secondary aspects of a coalition’ belief system, changes in the policy core aspects of a governmental programme”, and thus substantial or major policy change, “require a perturbation in non-cognitive factors external to subsystem.” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999: 123) Additionally, there may be another two alternative paths to major policy change presented as follows:

- 3) negotiated agreements as product of policy-oriented learning and alternative dispute resolution (Sabatier & Weible 2007)
- 4) internal shocks (Sabatier & Weible 2007)

The theoretical assumptions of ACF have not been so far neglected in the literature. Indeed, Glück proposed theoretically substantive NFPs is likely to be achieved through policy learning within appropriate professional forums such as NFPs and available scientific advice to resolve the SFM definition problem. It is further supported when there are supporting factors such as legally binding instruments (e.g. at EU or global level), external perturbations, finances (e.g. provided by World Bank, EU), and strong supra-national governance (Glück 1999: 49).

Although theoretically suggested and discussed (see Glück 1999, Humphreys 2004), there is virtually no empirical evidence for impeding or supporting influence of advocacy coalitions on substantive NFPs, let alone on substantial forest policy change. Thus, it remains still unclear what the role of NFPS is in regard to the achievement of substantial policy change towards SFM.

The ACF assumes further that coalitions who do not agree with the outputs of a professional forum have numerous institutional points of appeal such as courts, legislatures, agencies and so on. “Thus dissatisfied coalitions can almost always find at least one route of appeal (venue) that will substantially block or delay implementation of the new policy. In more centralised systems, where routes of appeal are restricted, it may be possible for a coalition to change policy simply by convincing a policy broker of the merits of its point of view without having to change the views of the other coalition(s).” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999)

In this context it is supposed that stakeholders spend considerable time amounts of time “venue shopping”, looking for institutional access where they might have a competitive advantage. (Weible 2006: 6) All in all, frequent result of venue shopping is policy stalemate when two competing coalitions dominate different venues. “When approval from both is required, the result is stalemate.” (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith 1999: 143)

To sum up, ACF possesses a significant explanatory power revealing that policy conflicts are not about technical deficiencies but about value differences. It specifies further that policy core beliefs are the most important stakeholder attribute for understanding individual behaviour. (Weible 2006: 6)

Based on the above-mentioned theoretical assumptions, the main unit of empirical analysis of the present study was the Bulgarian forest policy subsystem. The policy positions, beliefs, and influence of the political actors driving national forest policy processes, and external factors were analysed. Additionally, NFPS process elements and the interplay between participatory professional forum and policy reforms aiming officially at SFM were also investigated.

To answer the main research questions stated before, the variables influencing the dependent one, that is the *linkage between substantial NFP and major policy change*, were analysed. Based on ACF, the following hypotheses were formulated and empirically tested:

1. Hypothesis 1 / Coalition hypothesis 1: The actors in the Bulgarian forest policy subsystem can be lined up in advocacy coalitions, because policy core beliefs are in dispute in the discussion on the long-term policy of “sustainable forest management” since 1997 to date.

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2. Hypothesis 2 / NFPS hypothesis 1: NFPS process serves primarily as an instrument or venue to translate coalition's belief system on SFM into mandatory governmental decisions (e.g. forest reform) and not necessarily as tool to promote expanded understanding of SFM with focus on socio-ecological aspects.
3. Hypothesis 3 / NFPS hypothesis 2: Based on the above-formulated assumptions, substantial (major) policy change through learning across coalition even within substantial professional forum such as NFPS is rather unlikely because of:
 - a) policy conflicts on SFM policy core issues (e.g. “devil shift”, “perceptual filters”, distrust), and/or
 - b) venue shopping (dissatisfied coalitions try to make use of more promising venues to translate their objectives into mandatory policies).

The research design was based on a case-study model from Bulgaria. Primary data was collected by Sotirov through twenty-four problem-centred stakeholder interviews (Lamnek 2005) in fall 2006. The interviews were guided based on pre-defined, theory based open-ended qualitative questions. Secondary literature (e.g. mass-media publications, internet published policy papers and official documents) was also consulted and analysed to supplement the data gathered during the interviews.

The data collected was analysed through qualitative content analysis based upon Mayering (2003). In this regard, the transliterated primary text material and the secondary one were coded by analytical raster of categories set up deductively according to the theoretical assumptions of ACF. Additionally, new content categories were inductively derived where appropriate. Especially, abstraction and structuring of written text were used as techniques of the qualitative content analysis. The analysed data were then transferred into and presented in tables and other helpful illustration means as coherent as possible.

5. Results

In order to keep consistency and coherency, the main results are presented in the following and discussed in the next section. In order to safeguard the ethical criteria of the study as much as possible, in the following the actors interviewed are named only with their general affiliation.

Empirical data show the existence of three main advocacy coalitions in the Bulgarian forest policy subsystem such as state-oriented forestry coalition, private-oriented forestry and social-ecological ones, grouped around shared policy core beliefs and relatively coordinated actions. The narrow features of the beliefs' structure of each of the three competing advocacy coalitions are described in Table 1 (see below).

Analysing the empirical data in **table 1**, it is evident that coalitions perceive the state of forest resources and forest management in totally different way. That is, at least three mutually competing sets of problem definition and solutions seem to exist in practice.

On the one hand, the state-oriented coalition is concerned above all with threatened economic functions of State forest service in the face of financial shortages and administrative instability after far-reaching privatisations of 1997-2001 and political interference associated with it. Therefore, this coalition advocates policy changes primarily aiming at strengthening the economic functions and guaranteeing statutory independence of State forest service. On the other hand, the private-oriented coalition indicates also threats in the economic

dimensions of the SFM. However, these problems are associated by the actors with disadvantages for private business development and market distortion due to state monopoly, poor state management and corruption. Accordingly, this coalition insists on further liberalisation and privatisation of forest management as well as on strengthened co-determination by private business in policymaking. In contrast to these more or less forest utilisation emphases presented above, a third major group of concern exists in regard to the SFM. Namely, this coalition perceives ecological and social aspects of SFM such as poor biodiversity conservation and overexploitation, respectively poor work safety and locals' disadvantages, to be at substantial risk. According to the opinions of that coalition, the basic causes of these problems are associated with the prevalence of timber utilisation goals as well as economic and political material self-interests. Thus, a substantial policy orientation towards public goods and environmental welfare services followed by political commitment and public involvement is needed to improve the actual dissatisfying state of SFM.

When looking further at the empirical data it becomes apparent that the preferences of the three coalitions according to policy instruments (e.g. legislation, finances, information etc.), mandates' hierarchy and financing of the SFM are less homogeneous and sometimes overlap across each other. Although there are often similar policy instruments preferences, their usage is intended rather to translate the competing and mutually excluding policy core beliefs of the three coalitions presented in the ideas of problem perception and problem solution. That is, these instrumental beliefs could be seen as secondary aspects which help to translate the basic normative beliefs associated with the emphases on state-oriented forest management, private-oriented forestry-based economic development and conservation of forests in favour of social-ecological welfare concerns.

The respective actors' coalition membership is presented in **table 2**. According to the number of interviewees, the actors are fairly balanced distributed to the three main coalitions. In this context, the state-oriented forestry coalition is composed primarily of representatives of State forest service at national, regional and local level as well as of like-minded members of the parliament, forest science and development aid. In contrast, the private-oriented forestry coalition houses mainly private entrepreneurs and non-state owners, together with members of the parliament and forest science, respectively development aid. Lastly, the social-ecological coalition is dominated by environmental NGOs and further strongly supported by like-minded staff of Forest service, members of the parliament and the development aid.

Table 1: Belief systems in Bulgarian forest policy

State-oriented forestry	Private-oriented forestry	Welfare concern
<i>Problem definition</i>		
a) Economic aspects at risk - Administrative instability - Hindered forest management	a) Socio-economic aspects at risk - No public-private partnership - Business outfall, market distortion	a) Ecological aspects at risk - Overexploitation, segmentation - Poor biodiversity conservation
b) Ecological aspects safe - Resource sustainability	b) Ecological aspects - Qualitative timber resources decline	b) Social aspects at risk - Poor work safety & quality - Locals' disadvantages
<i>Basic causes of the problem</i>		
Weakened management role of state after privatisation reform '97. Finances decline, political interference.	State monopoly and corruption. Poor state management and bureaucratisation. "Political" commissioning	Prevalence of economic and political self-interests. Timber primacy and corruption. No public involvement. Neglect of welfare functions
<i>Problem solving</i>		
Strengthening the management role of state through reform aiming at financial and statutory independence of forest service	Further liberalisation, privatisation and market orientation. Co-determination by private sector, clear rules. Forestry and timber industry development	Welfare orientation Political commitment Public involvement Criminal prosecution
<i>Proper distribution of authority between government and market</i>		
Exclusively control and management functions by state (state forest company). Private provision of economic services (outsourcing) to state imaginable.	Control functions, award of contracts and investments by state. No management and timber market regulation by state. Exclusive private management and use in state-owned forests	Strengthened state control. Timber and environment services market regulation. Market self-regulation services impossible Compensations for eco-services
<i>Instruments</i>		
Primacy of legislative changes (State forest company) State timber sales	Primacy of legislative changes (secure „rules of the game“) Personnel development	Financial compensation of environment services & certification Public participation Stakeholder discussion
<i>Hierarchy</i>		
Maintenance of well proven 3 level organisation (Centralisation) Relative economic regionalisation	Decentralisation Debureaucratisation State mandate: control & silviculture No state economic monopoly	Decentralisation, if - no political pressure - HR development Centralisation, if - political pressure - no HR development
<i>Financing</i>		
Self-financing possible Additional revenues also needed (Budget, taxes, donors)	Self-financing impossible State aid & funding State staff reduction	Self-financing impossible Budget decoupling Eco-taxes, timber sales give-up

Table 2: Advocacy coalitions in Bulgarian forest policy (number of interviewed actors in brackets)

Advocacy Coalition	State-oriented forestry	Private-oriented forestry	Social-ecological welfare concern
Actors & Members	<p>Legislature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socialist party (1) - Royal liberal party (1) <p>Executive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deputy forest minister (1) - National forest service (1) - Regional forest service (1) <p>NGO's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Association of (state) foresters (1) <p>Science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University of Forestry /Development aid / (1) - Forest research institute (1) 	<p>Legislature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Royal liberal party (1) - Democratic peoples' (agrarian) party (1) <p>Private business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Association of private forestry entrepreneurs (2) - Timber industry chamber (1) <p>NGO's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Private and communal forest owners' association (2) <p>Science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University of Forestry (1) - University of Forestry /Development aid/ (1) 	<p>Legislature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democratic conservative party (1) <p>Executive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National forest service /Nature protection unit/ (1) <p>NGO's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental NGO's (3) <p>Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development aid (2)

In the following, the results concerning the internal features of Bulgarian NFPS, and its impact on policy-making in general and on policy change towards SFM in particular are described. The relevant interviewees' statements are consolidated and presented in **table 3**.

The content and basic process elements of NFPS are assessed quite differently both across the coalitions and within each coalition (see additional remarks below table 3). On the other hand, the second set of process variables such as policy trade-offs, conflict management as well as the impact of NFPS on changes in policy-making are virtually consistent. In the following, the main findings are presented at length according to similarities or discrepancies both across and within coalitions.

Firstly, the NFPS is assessed as positive and substantial in regard to its significance, content and process elements (e.g. participation, cooperation, coordination and consensus) by the state-oriented coalition, except the royal-liberal ally, and all actors from the other two competing coalitions who participated in the core group in the drafting, consulting and communicating the NFPS. In contrast to this, the private-oriented coalition excepting the actors above-mentioned, and the not directly involved minority of the social-ecological concern voice rather negative position on the content and process. They state deficiencies such as lack of long-term oriented goals and implementation means, conflictive and vague objectives as well as symbolic public involvement, and legitimisation of political, economic and state-oriented interests.

Looking further at the expressed main goals to be attained through a NFPS process it becomes apparent that each coalition expects the fulfilment of own policy core beliefs presented already above. Namely, the state-oriented coalition aspires towards reform providing more finances for the state forest service through strengthened forest management and utilisation functions. In contrast, the private-oriented actors insist on institutionalisation of clear rules for

private business development through further privatisation of state business operations. At the same time, the social-ecological coalition demands of the policy-makers fundamental forest policy change consistent with their core beliefs of welfare orientation towards biodiversity protection, ecologically sound management of natural resources and of opening of the conservative forest policy subsystem.

The items on conflicts occurred and their management during the NFPS process gives further valuable insights on the participatory manner of the forest policy-making process. The results in table 3 point to the occurrence of complex economic distributive conflicts between state and large scale forest-based industry against small and medium sized private entrepreneurs on the one hand. On the other hand, fundamental conflicts between state against private owners and environmental proponents appear in parallel.

The most interesting phenomenon during the participatory planning process is the one of the way in which the conflicts are managed. The results of the present study show clearly that the vague formulations after consensus seeking are the only significant problem solving instruments. Even more, all three coalitions pursue different influence strategies to strengthen their power position. For achieving the former, enlightenment of the “right” solutions is used in the case of state-oriented coalition, whereas the private-oriented coalition employs content management to keep its preferences safe of erosion. Concurrently, the social-ecological concern actors seek consensual agreements with the other opponents in order to stay at the negotiation board at any price and to translate its objectives.

Moreover, the perceived impact of NFPS on policy-making and policy change towards SFM is of particular importance in addressing the main research question of the present paper. All of the interviewed actors confess that the impact of the substantial participatory NFPS on policy change is virtually low or not existent in practice at all. Even more, the revised version of NFPS of 2006 is assessed by the non-state coalitions as instrument of the Bulgarian socialist party (as the leading party within the three-party coalition Government since 2005) to gain access into the policy-making and to re-establish its power position in the forest subsystem. Interestingly, this statement is confirmed by members of the state-oriented coalition noting the approval of the “improved” version of NFPS of 2006 by the Socialist party aiming at transferring its political programme on forest policy by that way.

Last but not least, the results refer univocal to existence of striking vested economic interests, and political and interpersonal power conflicts. Most of the interviewees point to political status-quo proponents, power struggles within the actual governing coalition parties (socialist, royalist-liberal and liberal-minority parties) over political institutions governing natural resources. In this context, the failure of NFPS of 2003 is associated by all actors above all as victim of the policy controversy on establishing a State forest company, pursued vigorously by state-oriented actors seeking to change the forest legislation in parallel. As already mentioned above, the “new” NFPS of 2006 lacks trust and legitimisation among the non-state actors as being perceived as tailored to the state-oriented coalition and its objectives.

In the next section, the results presented above are discussed against the research questions as coherent as possible as well as some valuable conclusions are drawn.

Table 3: Stakeholders’ perceived NFPS’ features (see also remarks below the table)

Item	Advocacy coalition	State-oriented forestry	Private-oriented forestry	Welfare (socio-environmental) concern
NFP significance		Positive, high significance	(Sadly) low significance	Positive, high significance
NFP content		High-value framework document Basic principles & priorities No implementation plan, but Fundament for operations	High-value document (“Good creation”) Vagueness is no weakness	High-value, contemporary document Strategic future-oriented decisions
Process elements				
- Participation		All major stakeholders involved	Stakeholder involvement	Stakeholder involvement
- Cooperation		All viewpoints considered, expert input	Expert input	Strategic future-oriented decisions
- Coordination		Integrated, inter-ministerial approach	Contemporary approach	Opening of conservatism
- Consensus		No allowance of expert conflicts	Constructive dialog	Interest trade-offs through discussion
Goals through NFPS		State-oriented management/ utilisation Reform for more state finances	Clear rules and support for private business Outsourcing of operations to private business	Policy change through welfare orientation (biodiversity protection, ecologically sound good management) and opening
Conflicts revealed		State vs. Large vs. Small Industry State vs. Private owners State vs. Environmental NGOs	State vs. private business	No process endogenous conflicts Major exogenous material conflicts (Timber primacy, no eco-management)
Conflict resolution		Enlightenment, communication or vague formulations	Vague formulations and text edition & deletion	Consensus and consent (Strategy “We on board at any price”)
Impact on decision-making		NFPS (2006) as Socialist party policy No implementation of NFPS (2003)	Low impact, not existent in practice NFPS (2006) for Socialist party arena access	Low impact (No reform through NFPS) NFPS (2006) for Socialist party arena access
NFPS’ failure for policy change		No political support/will Interest and power conflicts Approval of parliament not needed “Scapegoat” of State Company- Controversy	Vested economic interest conflicts “Overexploitation” status-quo by state (politicians, bureaucracy) & large-scale industries Political power struggles over resources (Socialist vs. Liberal minority party)	Status-quo maintenance by politicians “Scapegoat” of State Company Controversy Vested economic interest conflicts Political and interpersonal power struggle (Socialist vs. Liberal minority party)

Additional remarks to table 3:

1. Amendments to the opinion of state-oriented coalition

- Royal liberal parliament ally perceives insignificant NFPS due to lacking long-term development goals and concrete implementation programme (measures, timetable, duties etc.).

2. Amendments to the opinion of private-oriented coalition

- Private forestry above is presented by private business (1) and timber industry (1) associations, who were directly involved in the NFPS-core group.

- Liberal and conservative parliament (2) & private business (2) & private ownership allies (1), not participated in the NFPS, perceive a symbolic process with poor public and non-state involvement and consideration, state-oriented planning (pursuit of economic interests with state forestry company), and poor content (e.g. vague goals and mandates outdated means, socioeconomic gaps).

3. Amendments to the opinion of social-ecological coalition

- Differing views are expressed by conservative parliament (1) and E-NGO (1) allies, not members of core group, but participated in NFPS consultations. For example, they perceive poor content (no priorities, goal antagonism, to be revised) and defective process (symbolic, no independent experts' participation, political impact on bureaucrats and legitimisation of economic interests).

6. Discussion

Based on the results presented above regarding the belief systems and the coalition membership and activities, one can argue that the underlying conflicts and policy stalemates in the forest policy subsystem are influenced by external conditions (e.g. socio-economic conditions, government changes, policy impacts from other subsystems) and to large extent produced due to the three competing actors coalitions advocating basically divergent value priorities and preferences as policy oriented belief systems (e.g. state-dominated economic development, private-dominated economic development and social-ecological justice). In this regard the theoretical assumptions presented in hypothesis 1 are strongly supported by the empirical data.

Furthermore, the data presented in regard to the relationship between substantial NFPS and substantial policy reform or major policy change give also strong support to the last two hypotheses.

Firstly, the findings show undoubtedly that actors' behaviour is primary directed at belief translation into mandatory governmental programmes (e.g. from increased timber harvesting to expanded nature protection etc.)

Secondly, NFPS is ambiguous or even contradictory in policy core definitions as result of totally different normative understandings of SFM and due to participation of multiple stakeholders under constraint of consensus making. Thus the operationalisation of SFM in regarding problem solving strategies, instruments and institutions, leads to policy core conflicts or feigned consensus attached rather with problem suppression and less with problem solving. These problem management difficulties may be given to fundamental value differences and interest conflicts among the actors. The latter seems to support the assumptions that participation for substantive NFP could lead to increased conflicts between stakeholders (Humphreys 2004) because policy conflicts often “arise as consequence of the new understanding of the content of SFM” (Glück et al. 2004: 1). This may be regarded further as relevant due to the emphasis on multifunctional and “multi-value” forests as main components of the expanded understanding of SFM being formal aim of NFPs process. This in turn suggests the need for consideration of multiple stakeholders interested in SFM (Humphreys 2004: 41) who are interdependent but have often competing interests, deferring values, and unequal influence capacities.

Thirdly and lastly, it is well documented that the substantial NFPS has fallen victim to strategic “venue shopping” due to unsatisfied coalitions' policy core transformation expectations during the participatory planning process and policy stalemate within the controversy on state forestry company. Empirical evidence complementary denotes that the state-oriented coalition dominated the executive venue, whereas the private-oriented actors the legislative one. Particularly speaking, after normative stalemate within its venue the NFPS participatory policy process was abandoned, and other venues such as the Council of Ministers and the Parliament were accessed. But again, it came also to policy stalemate here as the normative conflict was further escalated by power conflicts among the multiparty governing coalition composed of socialist, royal-liberal and liberal-minority parties. (Memmler & Sotirov forthcoming)

Furthermore, the divergent perceptions on content and process of NFPS both across and within coalitions as well as the obvious mix-up of NFPS and state forestry company policy indicates clearly “devil shift”, perceptual blinders and escalating spirals of conflict which have impeding influence on major policy change as assumed in the literature (Sabatier & Weible 2007: 204).

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Furthermore, recent studies point to the fact that the policy process is further galvanised by actors behaviour directed to pursuit of vested material interests (“rent seeking”) and political struggles (“influence peddling”) aiming at control of political institutions. In this context, external events such as European integration, economic and political crises or internal shocks such as natural disasters (e.g. forest fires, floods) from 1997 to 2007 are used as windows of opportunities to translate policy beliefs into binding policies and to pursue material self-interests (Memmler & Sotirov forthcoming). The recent case of institutional changes through the spin-off of the State forest agency without any other substantial supplementary policy changes opens the question of studying the importance of agency design by policy compromise according to the Moe’s structural choice framework (Schlager 1999).

All in all, the Bulgarian case study draws the conclusion that a substantial participatory NFPS was insufficient for substantial policy change because of actors’ behaviour based on a composition of normative beliefs, self-interests, and power constellations. Thus participatory governance policy processes on rather conflicting issues seem difficult to bear policy outputs and outcomes that substantially satisfy the competing actors’ preferences and expectations. Therefore it is more likely, that given policy-making on SFM inevitability would represent only part of the perceived policy options depending on the power of single or group of actors to enforce her “right” problem solving in practice and thus leading to favourable conditions for future policy conflicts.

Notwithstanding, the failed participatory processes may be regarded as unique and valuable examples for providing policy learning for the policy actors, especially in consolidating democracies. In this regard, further research on the linkage of participatory governance instruments and changes towards long-term policies seem to be well justified and should be encourage.

* **Important remark:**

Dear reader, please do perceive the present material as a discussion basis. As it constitutes an early draft please do excuse also the possible grammar and logical mistakes. The author would therefore appreciate very much any critical comments and look forward to interesting discussions at the Conference venue.

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