



## Forest owners' discourses of forests: Ideological origins of ownership objectives



Tuomo Takala <sup>a, \*</sup>, Teppo Hujala <sup>a, b</sup>, Minna Tanskanen <sup>c</sup>, Jukka Tikkanen <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Eastern Finland, Faculty of Science and Forestry, School of Forest Sciences, P.O. Box 111, FI-80101 Joensuu, Finland

<sup>b</sup> Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), Bio-based Business and Industry, Koetilantie 5, FI-00790 Helsinki, Finland

<sup>c</sup> University of Eastern Finland, Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies, Department of Geographical and Historical Studies, P.O. Box 111, FI-80101 Joensuu, Finland

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### ABSTRACT

We still understand inadequately how ideological shared meanings affect private forest owners' ideas about forests and forest ownership. In this study, we examine how private forest owners adhere to different discourses of forests when producing meanings for forests and forest ownership. We especially concentrate on forest owners' objectives as a part of these discourses. Our discourse analysis combines qualitative (content analysis) and quantitative (NMS ordination) methods and is based on in-depth interviews with 24 Finnish forest owners.

We identified the discourse types of 1) the forester, 2) the economist, 3) the distant economist, 4) the critical anti-economist and 5) the dutiful forest owner in the analysis. The first main gradient separating the discourse types illustrated variation from uncertainty (distant economist, dutiful forest owner) to self-confidence in forest management (forester). The second main gradient ran from pure economic emphasis and non-criticalness (economist, distant economist) to an emphasis on non-monetary meanings and a critique of overriding economic orientation (critical anti-economist).

Our findings support the view that the position in relation to the economic utilization of the forest is an essential dividing factor among forest owners. More importantly, our discourse analysis revealed some important aspects of forest owners' objectives: 1) forest owners' general appreciations are often interpreted as actual objectives, resulting in an overly multi-objective impression of forest owners; and 2) careful consideration is always needed before emphasizing the complementarity of economic and non-monetary objectives. For some forest owners, a conflict between these two exists as long as economic objectives equal wood production.

In conclusion, meanings for forests and forest ownership are produced and reproduced whenever we speak or write about forests. Policy-makers, scientists, planners and counsellors especially should be more aware of the ideological discourses as a part of their argumentation if we aim to guarantee pleasant and fulfilling forest ownership for every forest owner.

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### 1. Introduction

Private persons own a substantial part of forestland in many European countries (Pulla et al., 2013) as well as in many states of USA (Butler et al., 2016). This means that private forest ownership as a phenomenon is an intimate part of the lived environment in

many rural areas. No wonder that non-industrial private forest owners have also inspired forest sciences for decades (e.g. Hahtola, 1973; Kurtz and Lewis, 1981). Every study on forest owners has its own perspective on forest ownership, having the capacity to change or reassert people's image of a forest owner. However, the aim to reveal something essential about being a forest owner is more distinct in some studies than in the others. Forest owner typologies, presenting the chaotic heterogeneity of forest ownership in a comprehensible and all-inclusive form, are undoubtedly among the most influential approaches in this respect. At the same time, typologies can unintentionally prevent us from seeing the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [takala.tuomo.o@gmail.com](mailto:takala.tuomo.o@gmail.com) (T. Takala), [teppo.hujala@uef.fi](mailto:teppo.hujala@uef.fi), [teppo.hujala@luke.fi](mailto:teppo.hujala@luke.fi) (T. Hujala), [minna.tanskanen@uef.fi](mailto:minna.tanskanen@uef.fi) (M. Tanskanen), [jukka.tikkanen@uef.fi](mailto:jukka.tikkanen@uef.fi) (J. Tikkanen).

whole diversity of forest ownership.

Two kinds of forest owner typologies exist, which we can call extensive and intensive (following Sayer, 2000 20–22). Extensive forest owner typologies aim to generalize over large populations. This goal is typically pursued when searching statistical associations and patterns from survey data (Sayer, 2000 20–22). As a result, researchers maintain a certain distance from their study objects. The vast majority of forest owner typologies produced so far are extensive typologies describing forest owners' objectives of forest owning and management (e.g. Kuuluvainen et al., 1996; Kline et al., 2000; Boon et al., 2004; Ingemarson et al., 2006; Salmon et al., 2006; Favada et al., 2009; Häyriinen et al., 2015). After the objective types or classes are created, the actual forest owners in the sample are typically grouped under each type in these typologies. This makes it possible to link the preselected background variables (sociodemographic, behavioural or related to forest property) to each type and so produce an estimate of the prevalence of each forest owner type as well as his characteristics and behavioural patterns in a reference population. Despite some variation, forest owner types in these extensive typologies generally fall within the following broad categories: economist, multi-objective owner, recreationist, self-employed owner and passive owner (Boon et al., 2004; Bengston et al., 2011).

The extensive survey-based approaches have also received criticism for their limited capacity to explain social phenomena (Bengston et al., 2011; Stanislovaitis et al., 2015). Statistical associations over large populations may tell little about the actual and often context-dependent relationships between objects (Sayer, 2000 20–22). The closed-ended questions typically used in these studies also considerably direct and restrict the respondents' expression (Bengston et al., 2011).

Instead, intensive approaches aim at an in-depth understanding of social and mental phenomena (Sayer, 2000 20–22). This necessitates that a researcher invests enough time with individual forest owners and tries genuinely to understand their life-world. This kind of approach usually creates more robust foundations for causal (but not successional) explanations of social phenomena than the statistical associations over large populations (Sayer, 2000 20–22). Intensive forest owner studies have been made for decades (e.g. Bliss and Martin, 1989; Lönnstedt, 1997), but few intensive forest owner typologies exist. Hujala et al. (2007) identified forest owners' decision-making styles in their intensive typology, while the typology of Lähdesmäki and Matilainen (2014) illustrated the meaning of forest owning for forest owners. Stanislovaitis et al. (2015) found very similar combinations of forest owners' objectives and practices in their intensive typology as typically identified in the extensive typologies.

In this study, we present an intensive typology of forest owners' discourses of forest. None of the extensive or intensive forest owner typologies has so far analysed the fundamental meaning of forests and forest ownership for the forest owner, acknowledging that the process of meaning-making is essentially intersubjective. Social aspects are commonly a concern in studies on forest owners' decision-making (e.g. Kurtz and Lewis, 1981; Hujala et al., 2007) but not as a part of meaning-making and articulation. Discourse analysis provides a solid base to fill this knowledge gap. We define a discourse of forests, or a forest discourse, here as a set of meanings and related ways of speaking that convey their own kind of truth about forests and forest ownership. Forest owners use these comparatively permanent but always transformable discourses as an essential resource when producing their linguistic representations of forests and forest ownership. The concept of discourse follows Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, 2010). Discourse analytical approaches have gained foothold in forest policy science over the past decade (Winkel, 2012; Leipold, 2014); however, these

approaches have been applied in forest owner research only occasionally (Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007; Vainio and Paloniemi, 2012) and, to our knowledge, they have never been combined with a forest owner typology. Our data consists of 24 in-depth interviews in which non-industrial private forest owners tell us about their own forests. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this study.

In the analysis, presented in Section 3, we first create a typology of forest owners' forest discourses. The typology and description of types are presented in Section 4. In Section 5, we deepen our analysis by comparing our typology to the hegemonic extensive typologies. We aim to answer the following questions. 1) How are the main gradients separating forest owners in the extensive typologies related to the main gradients in our discourse typology? 2) How coherent is the image of forest owners' objectives and behaviour in the extensive typologies when viewed from the perspective of our typology? In the following Section 2, we briefly present the theoretical background of our discourse analysis.

## 2. Theoretical framework

What is called discourse analysis has varied a lot, even within forest sciences (Leipold, 2014). A distinction can be made between descriptive and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010 30–55). The former aims at identifying and describing discourses, while the latter adds the perspective of social justice into the analysis (Fairclough, 2010 30–55). This article is perhaps closer to the descriptive end of this division, as our emphasis is on the description of the discourses. However, this article reports the first phase of a wider enquiry into forest owners' discourses. In the second phase, we will proceed into the analysis of discursive power, hegemony and marginalization in forest owners' forest discourses. Thus, despite our predominantly descriptive aim in this paper, the theoretical framework comes from the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough et al., 2010).

Like any other theory of discourse analysis, CDA does not offer unambiguous instructions for conducting an analysis, but delineates a loose theoretical-methodological framework (van Dijk, 1993; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 16–17). Importantly, this tradition is tightly connected to critical realism that *inter alia* means that discourses are seen as one, but only one, form of social practice (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 19–36; Fairclough et al., 2010). Discourses form a semiotic way to constitute other components of social as well as material and mental world, but are simultaneously constituted by them (Fairclough, 2010 230–254). In this study, forest discourses are semiotic entities that define the meaning of forest and forest ownership in a reciprocal relationship to non-discursive social, mental and material elements of reality.

Discourses essentially define what can be said, thought or done in actual situations *i.e.* they precede any social situation (Fairclough, 2010 69–83, 91–125). Following this idea, different forest discourses can be seen as a historical resource that forest owners may, typically unconsciously, use in their process of implicit and explicit meaning-making. In an interview setting, a forest owner can attach to none, one or several forest discourses, but no one can produce these comparatively permanent intersubjective constructions (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999 37–52) alone. Thus, the identification of forest discourses necessitates that we search for semantic entities beyond the boundaries of individual narratives. It is also obvious that forest discourses identified in this study have connections to discursive and non-discursive elements outside this particular study.

The historical nature of discourses does not mean that they could not be changed. Their existence depends on continuous social

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