



Structural power in Serbian anti-corruption forest policy network

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Anti-corruption
Forest policy network
Network governance
Structural power
Key actors
Serbia

ABSTRACT

This study uses network analysis to describe the network of actors created by efforts to incorporate anti-corruption measures into forest policy in Serbia. The anti-corruption forest policy network in Serbia is directed network, comprised of sixteen key policy actors (organizations), but only five out of the sixteen have strong and mutual cooperation regarding the incorporation of anti-corruption measures into forest policy. The most central actors are governmental agencies and public enterprises that form a sub-network with characteristics of an elite. Actors at the center of power are unlikely advocates of changes that might reduce their status and power. Thus, through a network analysis, this study points to the possible limits in the forest sector in terms of incorporating anti-corruption measures in forest policy in Serbia.

1. Introduction

The current catch phrase “from government to governance” captures the expectation that moving from classic “command and control” governmental regulatory administration to participatory decision-making within a complex system of public and private actors will both redistribute power between public and private actors and increase the capacity to effectively govern complex issues (Baccaro and Mele, 2009; Bevir, 2013; Borzel, 1998; Kjær, 2004). Governmental control is seen as limited based on the argument that government no longer has enough power to exert its will on other policy actors, perhaps due to lack of legitimacy, the complexity of policy processes, or the institutions involved (Guy Peters and Pierre, 1998; Rhodes, 1996). Public and private actors connected through inter-organizational linkages can create what Rhodes describes as network governance. “These networks are made up of organizations which need to exchange resources (for example, money, information, expertise) to achieve their objectives, to maximize their influence over outcomes, and to avoid becoming dependent on other players in the game” (Rhodes, 1988, pp. 42–43).

After the civil wars of the 1990s, Serbian legislators drew upon participatory processes and other principles of good governance to re-establish the political legitimacy of its government. “Serbian government enacted plurality of new policy documents as a consequence of the transition to democracy and market economy or as part of the preparation for the EU accession. A number of adopted documents have had a direct or indirect influence on the forest sector” (Nonić et al.,

2015, p. 1).

Regardless the above-mentioned changes, present forest ownership structure are dominated by the state. The total forest area in Serbia (excluding Kosovo and Metohija) covers about 29.1% of the territory of the whole country. The total growing stock of forests is 362,487,000 m³ of wood, with the annual increment of 9,079,000 m³ of wood. Private forests in Serbia occupy an area of 1,058,400 ha, which is 47% of all forests in Serbia (Banković et al., 2008). The management of state forests is under the public enterprises and other public organizations (i.e. state universities). While management of small private forests (planning, silvicultural decision etc.) is under the considerable influence of public enterprises, management of church forests is independent of the public enterprises.

A collaborative regional research project “The Adaptation of National Forest Policy Systems in South-East European Countries on International Governance Principles - GOVOR” (2010 – 2013) was the first effort to study the incorporation of good forest governance principles in the Western Balkans. This research project was one of several collaborative regional research efforts in FOPER - Forest Policy and Economics Research and Education - an EFI capacity building project funded by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and focused on critical topics of forest policy and economics in the Western Balkan region. The GOVOR project (2010–2013) found that one of the most critical issues in forestry in Serbia was related to the measures to combat corruption. Since measures to combat corruption (per se) were viewed as the most important barrier to good governance in the forest sector (Avidibegović

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2017.05.008>

Received 2 May 2016; Received in revised form 18 May 2017; Accepted 25 May 2017
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et al., 2014), we were interested in conducting further research on the topic of anti-corruption measures.

The aim of this article is to examine the network of forest policy actors involved in incorporation of anti-corruption measures into forest policy in Serbia. We examine that network by describing the most important network properties – actors and relations among actors (Knoke and Yang, 2008) and by presenting some network metrics. Drawing from network governance theories (Bevir and Rhodes, 2006; Borzel, 1997; Kickert, 1993; Kickert et al., 1997; Peterson, 2003; Rhodes, 1996), two aspects of an anti-corruption forest policy network seem of particular interest for Serbia.

Given the dominance of governmental actors in forest management of both state and private forest in Serbia, we developed our first proposition which is related to the positional power of governmental actors to exert their will on other actors. Our first proposition is also in line with the actor-centered approach (Krott et al., 2014), as governmental actors can apply coercive, and (dis-)incentive actions over non-governmental actors. Therefore, our first proposition is:

The most central (and therefore the most powerful) actors in the network are likely governmental agencies and public enterprises.

Secondly, given the presumed centrality of public actors, we assume that any effective efforts to develop and implement anti-corruption forest policies will require strong relationships between public agencies for forest and nature protection, and public enterprises responsible for state forest management. Therefore, the second proposition is:

The most important relationships for the incorporation of anti-corruption measures into forest policy are the ones between governmental agencies and public enterprises.

This study focuses on the years 2012 and 2013 and shows the initial stages of an emerging network of forest policy actors related to the incorporation of anti-corruption measures into the forestry sector. While many changes in forest policy continue to take place in Serbia, our analysis points to the changes necessary for effective network governance for anti-corruption forest policies. Thus, this paper sets a basis for continuing research on this topic and provides the capacity to develop a broader understanding of how network governance capacity emerges or does not.

This article has the following structure: we start with a methodology which includes methods for data collection and data analysis using structural network analysis. Then we present how corruption is addressed in relevant policy documents in Serbia. We then follow with the results divided into two sub-sections (1) actors in the network, and (2) network metrics. Based on the results, we discuss our findings in the light of a policy network concept with respect to the two propositions. At the end, we derive conclusions regarding the limitations of the network for effective incorporation of anti-corruption measures in forestry in Serbia.

2. Methods

In the methods section, we present some definitions we used in our research, and continue with two sub-sections: data collection via semi-structured interviews; and data analysis via structural network analysis.

Structural network analysis and social network analysis are synonyms, often used for the same purpose – to understand and describe the networks and “how the patterns of relationships within a social system allocate resources, such as support, money and power” (Sharp, 1998, p. 18). We use the term structural network analysis (Berkowitz, 1982; Knoke, 1994) as we want to bring attention to the positional power of the actors within the network. Distribution of power among actors is partly a function of the positions that actors occupy (Knoke, 1994). “In general, a position has greater power to the extent that others depend on it for information, goods, and affection that are unavailable elsewhere. A position lacks power when other actors enjoy many alternatives for securing their preferences” (Ibid., pp. 9–10). Therefore, a position's power is determined by the structures, and “it exists apart

from actors' knowledge or ignorance about the larger opportunity structures within which their positions are embedded” (Knoke, 1994 p. 10).

We used the definition of The National Anti-Corruption Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2013–2018, which defines corruption “...[A]s a relation based on abuse of an official or social position or influence, in the public or private sector, aimed at gaining personal benefit, or benefit for others” (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 97/08, 53/10, 66/11 – CC decision, 67/13 – CC decision, 112/13 – authentic interpretation and 8/15 – CC decision, 2008, p. 1). By incorporation, we mean the inclusion of anti-corruption measures into forest policies and legislation (and not only on submitting Integrity Plans). Interests are policy preferences. For purposes of this research, we define influence as the ability of the organization to pursue its goals and incorporate its preferences into policy or get other organizations to support it. We defined cooperation as an act of working together (formally and informally) in the incorporation of anti-corruption measures into forest policy. Respondents explained how they perceived the quality of cooperation.

2.1. Data collection

We collected the data in the period from June 2012 to July 2013 using semi-structured interviews and by reviewing existing legislative and policy framework related to forestry and corruption. Respondents were identified through a snowball sampling technique (Goodman, 1961), which we applied specifically for the purpose of network research. In total, sixteen different organizations were identified. Representatives of fourteen organizations were interviewed, but representatives of two organizations from the nature protection sector did not respond, which may have affected the representativeness of the sample. The interviewees were at the highest positions within the identified organization. Before the interview, we asked them to represent the opinion of the organization, and to highlight when they were expressing individual opinions. Using a reputational method, we selected the Ministry responsible for forestry as the initial respondent. This method uses the most knowledgeable informants or experts to nominate other actors, in this case, the Ministry of Forestry (Knoke and Yang, 2008, p. 17). As Christopoulos (2009, p. 1) stated “A number of expert professionals possess knowledge or can make assessments that are not available in the public domain. This knowledge is often considered confidential, sensitive or privileged. It could pertain to knowledge or assessment of illegal activities or the covert activity of powerful individuals or organizations.” Snowball stages are illustrated in Table 1.

Nominations in all three stages were overlapping, so Table 1 presents only new nominations. We contacted all respondents by phone first. Nine respondents accepted a face-to-face interview, and six respondents declined a face-to-face meeting but agreed to individually fill out the interview sent by e-mail.

Data were collected about the organization's interest in and influence on the incorporation of anti-corruption measures in forest policy, as well as on cooperation of identified actors.

The questionnaire had two parts, and took an approximately hour and a half with each respondent. The first part fulfilled the needs of the

Table 1
Snowball stages.
Source: Grašić, 2014, p. 22.

Stage	New nominations	Responded	Not responded
Initial	1	1	–
1st	5	4	1 ^a
2nd	8	7	1 ^a
3rd	2	2	–
Total	16	14	2

^a Reminder was send three times to the respondents, and there was no answer.

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