

MODERN APPROACHES TO FOREST POLICY EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Norbert Weber
Technische Universität Dresden - Germany

ABSTRACT

The framework for forest policy education at European universities has been changing considerably during recent years. These changes are resulting from new paradigms in educational policy as well as modified roles of forests and forestry in many countries. The contribution presents shortcomings and needs in forest policy education and shows several approaches how these challenges can be met. Taking a look at the ongoing developments, the author argues that a modern forest policy education can contribute substantially to strengthen the efforts towards sustainable development.

Key words: forest policy; curriculum development; university education; Bologna Principles; Europe

Introduction

Forest policy occurs at the interface between forests, forestry and society. It can be described as „purposive course of action or inaction followed by an individual or group in dealing with a matter of concern regarding the use of forest resources“ (Cubbage et al. 1993). It is also a „social bargaining process which regulates conflicts caused by interests in the utilization and protection of forests according to the programs of the forestry sector (Krott 2005).

Forest policy courses are included in many European forestry curricula. However, their scope and content varies from country to country according to the position of the forest sector in the respective domestic economy and society (Krott 2005). There are enormous differences in the significance of forest policy even between syllabi of universities in the same country. In many cases forest policy is not regarded as a separate teaching subject and instead integrated in courses on economics or law. Other universities have recognized the necessity and advantages of a sound forest policy education for their graduates (FAO 2006).

The new framework for forestry education at European universities

Taking a look at the forestry sector, it is obvious that the *teaching object* of forestry universities has undergone fundamental changes. These changes can be characterized by catchwords like globalization, decentralization, devolution, cross-sectoral policies, public-private partnerships, new public management. In countries with economies in transition, forest policy formulation and implementation have evolved quickly (FAO 2006); processes of privatization and restitution have to be depicted and analyzed. All these developments have resulted in a changing role of forests, forestry and foresters in society (cf. Kennedy et al. 1998). Besides others, the reduction of personnel in state forest administrations has direct

consequences for job opportunities of the graduates. The increasing use of cross-sectoral linkages (e.g. rural development) necessitates the ability to think beyond borders of the respective disciplines. New actors (e.g. Non-governmental Organizations, Transnational Corporations) and new processes (e.g. National Forest Programmes, Forest Sector Technology Platform) have to be analyzed. Complex models of policy science provide improved possibilities for explanation (e.g. advocacy coalition approach, multiple stream framework).

Parallel to alterations in the forestry sector, the *framework for teaching* forestry at universities has been changing considerably. On a worldwide scale, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an accepted paradigm (UNESCO 2007) that favours all initiatives to instruct students in sustainable management of natural resources. On the level of European Union, the Lisbon goal of making Europe the most competitive region in the world necessitates vigorous efforts to improve education on every level. By promoting BSc/MSc degrees and accreditation procedures, the Bologna process leads to a streamlining and internationalization of higher education in many subjects, including forestry. In addition to knowledge, skills are in the focus. Virtual education and web-based courses are gaining in importance. The Lecturer's autonomous decision of what to teach is being replaced by so-called learning outcomes, i.e. statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after a completion of a process of learning (EU 2004).

The modified framework conditions for the forest sector and the European initiatives in the policy of education have been resulting in fast and far-reaching *modifications of forest curricula* in many countries. Bachelor and Master courses are replacing traditional forestry degrees (e.g. Diploma, Specialist). Both for efficiency and didactic reasons, many universities offer integrated courses of several

faculties on one campus. Sometimes cross-university courses are being built on national level. Several locations have introduced modern teaching principles (e.g. constructive alignment¹) and forms (thematic modules, project work, virtual education, buzz groups, panel discussions, roleplays, simulations etc.). With regard to forest policy, it also can be observed that some lecturers are broadening their scope of teaching towards other subjects like environmental policy or environmental law. Indeed, the most important change is taking place in the form of internationalization: (i) courses are to an increasing extent offered in a foreign language, mostly English; (ii) foreign lecturers are integrated into the courses (iii), the share of students and course participants from foreign countries is rising and (iv) more and more international coherences are integrated into the syllabi.

Examples for cross-border initiatives to improve forest policy education

Based on the gap between identified shortcomings in existing courses and the rising demand for forest policy knowledge, several cross-border initiatives have been launched to improve forest policy education. They comprise very different forms, ranging from short courses at universities to student initiatives in the World Wide Web. In the following, the intended learning outcomes of four examples are depicted.

The *MSc Programme Euroforester* has been developed as a joint project of 13 forest faculties in Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Russia, Ukraine and Sweden). Within this study course on forestry in the Baltic Sea region, forest policy is addressed in an own sub-unit regarding forest policies at national, regional and global levels. Besides, comparative analyses between forest policies of countries in the Baltic Sea region are accomplished. The learning outcomes comprise the ability of students to

- recognise regional, European and global forestry structures, including resources, actors and processes
- carry out comparative analyses of national and international forest policies and economic systems
- apply political and economic theories to analyse national, supranational and global forest policy issues and processes
- debate forest policy and economic issues in an international setting, advocate own viewpoints
- write reflective and creative essays in English

- generate and implement ideas for forest policy and economics within an international context (Euroforester 2006; <http://www.euroforester.org/index.html>).

The *NOVA-BOVA network* consists of Northern and Baltic universities and has offered a one-week postgraduate course „Forest Policy“. This course delivers an overview of modern policy science; it helps identifying and considering the key elements of forest policy. Another aim is exchanging information on the current state of knowledge and experience in forest policy formulation. Analytic skills of young forestry researchers are improved. Contacts between people who are involved in forest policy research, studies and implementation are encouraged. The course emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of modern forest policy science, integrating economics, sociology, political and administrative sciences with forest sciences.

After completing this forest policy module, students should be able to

- engage into a competent discussion on key forest policy issues in the Baltic Sea region and worldwide;
 - evaluate policy performance using adequate strategies and criteria;
 - apply adequate theories, methods and models to explain and predict national, supranational and global forest policy issues and processes;
 - apply a system view on the forestry as a part of society, identifying policy drivers and seeing the underlying relationships;
 - analyse forest topics in mass media using established scientific methodology;
 - search for relevant literature sources and evaluate them critically;
 - prepare reports using structure and requirements for a scientific paper;
 - write reflective essays in English (<http://www.bova-university.org/index.php?list=forestry>)
- The initiative *“Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research” (FOPER)* was developed as a cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland with the European Forest Institute to strengthen the capacities in the Western Balkan region. It includes a master program on forest policy and economics. Regarding forest policy, it aims at improving several core competencies. Graduate students should be able to (i) explain a forest political issue (problem) by using appropriate theories and hypotheses; (ii) specify the interests, values and power endowment of the participating political actors

¹ Constructive alignment means the tuning of learning and teaching activities as well as assessment methods with the intention to optimize the intended learning outcomes.

and their relationships; (iii) assess the appropriateness of various policy instruments to resolve the problem, based on politically agreed objectives like sustainable forest management (FOPER 2005).

These core competencies are elaborated in more detailed sub-competencies. It is intended that the graduate students

- have knowledge of and insight into the actual and expected political developments and the socio-economic consequences of these for forests
- have knowledge about polity, politics and policies affecting forest
- have knowledge about national, European, and international legislation (incl. Soft law) affecting forest
- understand the process of the policy-making system
- are familiar with the level of conflict arising from competing interests, values and ideologies referring to the use of forests
- assess the impact of different forest policy instruments (regulatory, economic, informational, procedural, institutional) to SFM
- are able to formulate a clear and understandable policy and to create societal acceptance for it (FOPER 2005).

The *Forest Policy Education Network (FPEN)* is an initiative of the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA) to raise the awareness on forest policy among forestry students. It is encouraged by several institutions, e.g. EU Youth Programme, European Forest Institute, European Tropical Forest Research Network and national institutions in several countries. FPEN network consists of 3 main elements: seminars on forest policy, student participation in decision-making processes and an internet platform serving as a channel to communicate current information on forest policy to students. Based on the WIKI technology, the knowledge base is filled collaboratively by active readers. Student participation is especially promoted because, besides others, it makes policy a living experience, provides good contacts and supports key qualifications (www.forestpolicy.net).

Remaining shortcomings and needs in forest policy education

General lack of forest policy education. In spite of the increasing meaning of forest policy, especially in developing countries and countries in transition there are a lot of universities where forest policy is not recognized as a discipline as such and no classes on forest policy are given. Deficits are also obvious in a second group of universities where forest policy issues are integrated in the framework of management or legislation education. In a third group,

only a small amount of hours is available for teaching forest policy (FAO 2006).

Lack of international orientation. It has been observed that curricula of forestry schools rarely focus on the issues discussed at the international level. This could be a result of missing knowledge about global issues, international debates and the needs of international organizations for certain knowledge and skills. It could also stem from a low interest on the part of students and faculty, a shortage of resources and uncertainty about future employment for graduates. However, "[U]niversities, as leaders of society, can no longer ignore global forestry problems and concentrate only on producing graduates well trained to deal with local and national issues. Global issues are too serious to be left to diplomats and politicians" (El-Lakany 2004).

Lack of knowledge how to influence decisions. Based on insufficient knowledge in forest policy affairs, forest policy actors are often not enough involved in the established institutional structures of horizontal decision making processes. Later, at the implementation stage, they are obliged to apply the decisions taken by these general political networks without having the opportunity to provide their forestry expertise at an early stage (Biro et al. 2002).

Need for adaptation of teaching contents. In recent decades, global, national and local influences have changed the forestry sector fundamentally in every part of the world. Forestry education has to be adjusted to these changes. Graduates have to be equipped with the respective skills and tools to meet the new reality. They have to be able to meet the expectations of an expanded stakeholder pool. In modern forestry curricula, many issues with a forest policy core have to be included, e.g.

- public sector and community joint management of forest resources;
- forestry and its role in biodiversity conservation and protection;
- forests as recreation sites including ecotourism;
- partnerships with the private sector for research, management, and timber processing.
- forests as carbon sinks and the international implications of trading in carbon sink credits;
- civil society information delivery relating to forest and forestry issues;
- forest policy formulation and implementation;
- forestry education and training for non-traditional target groups;
- inter-relationship with other sectors such as agriculture, natural resources management, education, tourism, infrastructure, and trade (Gasperini 2001).

Increasing demand for “meta-competencies”.

Graduates of forest policy courses need to be equipped with several capabilities going beyond the traditional forestry education. They should be able to (i) recognize patterns of policy making, (ii) develop an analytic view, (iii) deal with increasing complexity, (iv) question popular concepts and (v) apply creativity for problem solution. For example, recognizing patterns can be promoted by asking the following questions: Who enters the political arena? When? Why? Who will be affected? How do the affected persons/groups react? Which consequences does it have?

Specialists educated in forest policy are in demand. In contrast to the actual role of forest policy in many syllabi at universities, there is an increasing need for specialists disposing of enhanced and sound knowledge in forest policy affairs. Those graduates can be engaged in the field of interest representation (e.g. forest owners, forest industries, environmental protection), forest policy making (e.g. forest policy speaker of political parties), forest and environmental public administration (e.g. international/European/EU forest policy, national forest programme formulation), management in state forest enterprises, management of national parks, other protected areas and urban forests, forest extension service, as advisors (e.g. natural resource management) or project managers (cf. FOPER 2005). Taking into account the long-term orientation of forestry, graduates with knowledge and skills in forest policy are predestined for dealing with all aspects of sustainable development.

Conclusions

Taking into account the above mentioned developments in the forestry sector and the changes in the pedagogic paradigms, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, the increasing complexity of forest policy *making* increases importance for adequate forest policy *teaching*. Forest policy should be integrated in forest syllabi as an independent subject and equipped with the necessary amount of hours. Second, in spite of some promising approaches, there are still many deficits in education in international forest policy and multi-level governance. Third, a sound education in national and international forest policy will be indispensable in the respective job market of the future. Fourth, learning outcomes and competencies have moved into the focus of curriculum development and replace former teacher-oriented approaches. Fifth, permanent evaluation of *relevance* and *quality* of teaching will be necessary to improve forest policy education.

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