

Characteristics and Motives of Private Forest Owners

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Editorial

The institutional environment in which different actors of the forestry sector transact is in constant change. Some of the institutional change can be explained through mental models and ideologies [1]. All these processes have also influenced the management of private forests. Non-industrial private forest owners are often classified to a limited number of forest owner types. Such classifications usually have problems with some owners not belonging to any type identified. Problems may occur also with owners recognized as “a new type of owners” because private forest owners are rather individual and dynamic in their ownership, management objectives and decisions. Despite these drawbacks these kind of classifications could be very useful in understanding them and their behaviour. Private forest owners have quite diverse set of motives and approaches to forest management and this might not be always sufficiently taken into account in designing forest policy tools [2]. Furthermore, any narrow policy approach accompanied with strict rules, and focusing on technical details/issues might lead to a non-compliance with national forestry objectives. For example several management-related problems may arise in forestry, e.g. low efforts of reforestation, lack of interest in stand development or low harvesting rates. This is often the case in post-socialist countries as there is still an imbalance between the state and private sector which leads to lower concern in private activities and to problems of implementing the national policies [3]. All these processes have diversified research approaches to private forestry.

Motives are defined as reasons for acting in a certain way, but there is an understanding that motives are influenced by much broader mental constructs. The values and objectives of an owner might be the most important variables influencing decision-making. This is often seen as an indirect assumption and not a subject for direct analysis [4]. There have been identified many different motives for forest management decisions using qualitative methods [5]. It is also underlined that large extent of these motives might not be quantifiable and that a particular decision can be a result of different motivations. Quantitative analysis of a mix of different motives should give a better description of forest owners than a simple owner classification. In addition to the management motives, forest owners' decision-making has also external influences. These could be various policy tools, economic aspects (market conditions), forest condition etc. For example, an experienced forest owner might not be able to make harvesting decisions because of poor weather conditions. Also, some forest owners don't have enough technical or institutional knowledge about forest management, therefore their motives may not be realised. Forest policy tools don't consider enough the diversity of forest owners and more support is needed to help the owners to accomplish their different forest management objectives.

The size and characteristics of a forest property plays an important role how forest owners manage their forest and value different forest-related benefits. Bliss and Kelly [6] found that “family forests in particular reflect the values, objectives and capabilities of their individual

owners”. The emotional bond to the land is the most influential and is often linked to the way the forest has been obtained i.e. the bond might be stronger if the property has been recovered through the restitution processes [7]. Bengston et al. [8] concludes that forest ownership can be very closely linked to the identity of the forest owner. Forest ownership has therefore a significant social influence on people and the nature of this influence is dependent often on history and the characteristics of the forest. If forestry goes through a significant change (e.g. restitution) the outcome of the change has substantial influence on how people value forests.

Forest owners are very different not only in terms of their property but also how they value and perceive their forest. There are owners who value monetary benefits and concentrate more on the economic aspects of forest management. These forest owners more likely belong to forest owners' organizations [9], their forest management decisions are formed differently than in the case of owners who value e.g. biodiversity and nature conservation. It is certain that the owners who value biodiversity more than income still might manage their forests, but the way these forest owners reach forest management decisions is influenced by other aspects than just market conditions or forest maturity. Policies do not take this kind of motivation into account and forest owners are seen as a rather homogeneous group. This poses difficulties in implementing policies because it often raises reluctance among forest owners. Also, if proper policy tools are not used the implementation of policy goals might fail. More flexibility in both production and protection forestry could help to improve the implementation of national strategies. This flexibility should include proper advisory and extension services.

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