

# The Politics of Forest Bureaucracy as a Subject of Comparative Studies

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Despite comparative analysis has hardly been done in the science of forest policy so far, it could offer a number of advantages in this field of social sciences. Comparisons make use of the compiled material from different countries, point to new origins and solutions of issues of forestry and allow to question the common presuppositions in the national forest policy in a critical way.

The basic requirement of fruitful comparative research is a common scientific framework. In the light of empirical-analytical theory it is more promising to compare only one important factor across regions than the whole system. The forest administration could be such a suitable object of comparison in particular because it is to be found all over the world, and it has a formal and partly public organization with a number of similarities. The product of forest administration is policy. The significance of the bureaucratic behaviour in agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimating, and implementation with regard to an issue of forest policy is to be analysed.

The two significant fields of analysis, namely forest administrations and the issues of forest policy characterize the strategies of research. By making use of a collection of papers dealing with forest bureaucracy we can select countries for comparison according to the following criteria: socioeconomic context, space and time. The next step is to analyze comparatively the behaviour of the forest bureaucracy in treating a special forest issue. The explanations can be tested empirically in different countries. Perhaps the dying of the forest ("Waldsterben") could be a suitable issue as an object of comparative analysis which again could enlarge our knowledge about the forest administration as a political factor.

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## Comparative analysis of forest policy

In contrast to other scientific fields of research in forestry there are only few comparative studies in the field of forest policy. This is understandable, because scientists are used to apply their findings in natural science to the forests, the growing of the trees, logging

etc. all over the world, whereas forest policy and the knowledge about it are mainly regarded as a particular matter of each single state, and therefore could only be considered in separate case studies. In spite of this I want to put forward the idea of a comparative study that goes beyond national boundaries. This would have a number of advantages

for the science of forest policy. Such studies could fruitfully make use of the compiled material about forest policy in various countries. The most common presuppositions of the forest policy in our home-countries often escape our notice although they are of high political significance. They become visible only in comparison with other countries. New suggestions coming from foreign countries may improve current explanations. Additionally the comparison suggests questions which scientists for political reasons do not dare to deal with in their home countries.

The attempt to study questions concerning forest policy in a comparative way makes obvious the necessity of a scientific framework for research, which has some common features beyond national boundaries. The empirical analytic theory assumes to offer such an universal basis (comp. Clück 1983). The fundamental point is to extend the empirical test of scientific explanations of forest policy by using observations made in other countries. But the question is not the evaluation of the forest policy of these countries (Przeworski & Teune 1970, p. 30). Attempts of an evaluation in comparative political science often result in a condemnation of foreign countries from the point of view of Central European conceptions of forest policy. There might be some political interest in such evaluations, but they cannot be justified scientifically (Beyme 1974, p. 148 ff.).

## The suitability of public administration for comparisons

*Administration as a concrete part of the political system*

The political system gives a model of the representatives of forest policy and the fundamental processes (Wuthe 1977). This model seems to be very suitable because of its extensive concept and its universal applicability. In these terms on a high level of abstraction nearly all phenomena in forest policy can be discussed. But it is this generality of the elements of the system and of its terms that

produces problems in practical research. The starting point as well as the findings of the political system analyses remain on a level so high in abstraction that they cannot be definitely applied in statements about specific political processes in certain countries. The theory of systems hardly succeeds in operationalizing of the terms, which is in fact the central issue of comparative research (Rose 1974).

The reduction of the object of study to a part of the political system reduces the danger that scientists in various countries discuss phenomena without realizing that they are not comparable. The public administration, however, represents an important and comparable part of the political system. It is to be found all over the world and it is well known in contrast to many other political actors. The public administration can be described as those structures of government which are concerned mainly with the process of rule-application. That means, that general social rules are converted into specific decisions for individual cases (Almond & Powell 1978). By applying this definition it is easy to identify the forest administrations in all countries as those parts of the public administration whose main concern is forestry.

*The formal structure as a starting point for research*

Worldwide public administration has a formal structure that is even partly public. This fact offers clearly defined starting points for investigations on the basis of organization and management theories. Proceeding from these considerations, which have been successfully applied in the analysis of forest production units, the analysis of forest administration could adopt operational hypotheses approved in several countries.

In contrast to many other political agents in forest bureaucracy the formal organization and self-presentation, that are very similar everywhere, facilitate the comparative investigation. The advantage is, that for comparisons between similar, but not identical objects a smaller number of influential factors is sufficient to explain the behaviour of ad-

ministration, than if the objects of comparison differ widely and therefore the number of different factors exceed by far the extent that is possible to check empirically.

Investigations that are restricted to the object of the administration naturally do not include the political-economic conditions in several countries. That means, the explanations refer to important factors such as owners of the forests, interest groups, economic and ecological development etc. only as independent variables, whose emergence and actual distinctions need not to be further explained. The significance of the political and economic conditions for the behaviour of forest administration is easy to realize because of the similarity of the organization of bureaucracy. Even investigations that are restricted to a single state in most cases offer not more than medium range theories. Consequently it is an illusion to think that comparative analyses could offer total explanations of political developments.

#### *The politics of forest bureaucracy*

The exclusive analysis of the administration organization and its problems would lead to a non-political research which takes the institutions with their characteristics for granted and which studies them according to similar criteria as in privately owned firms (Schnur 1961). Basic ideas for the investigation would be questions of the efficiency of forest administration (Wenger 1983). Although such studies are very important, they tell little about the essential political significance of forest bureaucracy, which is also regarded as important by the official side. The products of administrations are political acts. In addition to the organization these policies should be taken into consideration as the second important object of research.

If we want to avoid a normative evaluation of the policy of the forest administration and also exclude juridical reflections relating to norms, the process of forest policy offers itself as a framework of reference for the analysis of administrative behaviour. In the case of a definite issue in forest policy the contributions of the forest bureaucracy to the different

phases of the policy process should be studied. The objects of analysis is the behaviour of the forest bureaucracy in the agenda setting, the policy formulation, the legitimating and implementation concerning a special issue of forestry (Peters 1982). The political success or failure of forest bureaucracy is proved in the treatment of the actual issue, whereas the reasons for the administrative behaviour chiefly lie in several particulars of the organization. A study going beyond national boundaries offers a wide empirical basis to apply the theoretic approach shown above. By this way our knowledge about forest administrations as political factor will be enlarged in contrast to a mere organization analysis (comp. Heidenheimer 1975).

#### **Strategies in the comparative research of forest bureaucracy**

The two significant fields of analysis, namely forest administration and the issues of forest policy, characterize the possible strategies of research that can be chosen. It seems of particular interest to compare, whether and how very differently organized forest administrations arrive at similar or different solutions of issues of forest policy. What impact has, e.g., the status of a special administration on the bureaucratic acts against the dying of the forests? What influence has the fact that in some countries the forest administration does not only regulate but also directly cultivates the forests on the bureaucratic treatment of rising conflicts concerning outdoor recreation in forests? Even the comparison between Austria, Germany and Switzerland would give important answers to these questions.

Apart from analyses in a homogeneous political-economic context a heterogeneous context could be chosen deliberately. Do comparable forest administrations in Western and Eastern political systems choose similar policies to protect their forests or does such an independence from the political context not exist?

The selection of the local units naturally need not follow the national states. One of the criteria for the differentiation of areas that are to be compared is their degree of economic development. Especially the status of the cultivation of forests – exploitation or sustained yield forestry – should be taken into consideration. The differentiation between the phases of socio-economic development points to the temporal dimension of comparisons. Are there any parallels between the historical beginning of forest administration in Central Europe and the formation of a forest administration organization in developing countries? Do forest administrations deal with certain issues, e.g. with the dying of the forests, always in a way similar to the case when this problem occurred in a country for the first time?

The selection of suitable objects of study with regard to context, space and time results in a varying number of cases for comparison depending on the degree of generalization. General structures of the forest administration can be comparatively studied on a quantitative level, by considering empirical data from a large number of countries. If we analyse very specific particulars of administration behaviour, we will find only few subjects of comparison, so that statements only will be possible on a qualitative level.

Apart from the problems concerning research organization fruitful comparative research must answer the above question, if comparative research means more than that e.g. an Austrian scientist writes about German or American forestry (Luhmann 1963). The first step would be an attempt of a typology based on a collection of papers written so far about political and historical as-

pects of the forest administrations in different countries. With this compilation of knowledge analyses are possible with the scientific method outlined above. The crucial point is not a general comparison between forest administrations but the comparison of their respective behaviour dealing with certain issues. Could the dying of the forests perhaps be such a suitable problem? By doing comparative research science would only choose that course which pragmatic forest administration have already followed quite successfully for a long time.

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