

## **Rethinking forestry**

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Panel convener: Jens Friis Lund, Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen

Panel description:

Forestry is the way we conceive of, demarcate, measure, manage and manipulate landscapes with trees. Since its inception in 18<sup>th</sup> century Central Europe, forestry has been a project of territorialization of landscapes with trees. Further, up until recently, its sole aim was efficient and rational production of one commodity, namely timber.

Historically, forestry was central to the building of States and empires. Foresters were deeply involved in mapping, demarcation, control and exploitation of remote territories. Through this, a Eurocentric, anthropocentric and economistic approach to landscapes with trees was inserted into forestry administrations across the World.

This long history of the forestry profession continues to haunt its present. Contemporary forest policy efforts, such as timber legality verification and participatory forestry, remain framed in technical-bureaucratic terms. Similarly, forestry research and education reproduce this view of landscapes with trees. Thus, the response of foresters to global sustainability problems has been predictable – emphasizing information technologies, control and oversight, and intensified production of biomass and carbon. Yet, the promises of this intensification are highly debatable. Thus, it is doubtful that forests can shoulder foresters' expectations of conserving and restoring enormous tracts of landscapes with trees amidst an unprecedented global tree loss, owing to rapidly changing and combining biotic and abiotic stressors and increased global metabolism driven by global trade and consumption.

The time to rethink forestry is, therefore, ripe. This involves a reconceptualization of forests and forestry along the lines of post-development and -colonial thinking pertaining to: (i) the relationships between landscapes with trees and foresters' politically designated forests; (ii) ideas of forest modelling and planning and their socio-ecological underpinnings and; (iii) the role of forestry professionals and bureaucracies; and (iv) how forestry is reproduced through education and institutional socialization processes in forestry schools and professional forums.

Our aim is to contribute to a decentering of forestry away from its Eurocentric, anthropocentric and economistic past, and towards a more open and plural future that embraces a broader set of forest values and puts local, situated and indigenous knowledge at par with techno-bureaucratic ways of representing and understanding landscapes with trees.

On the following pages are abstracts of the five papers that will be presented in this panel.

## **Colonizing the mind: forestry education as symbolic violence**

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This paper considers the role of forestry education in reproducing scientific forestry based on the case of the forestry program at the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania. Our study shows that reproduction (persistence) of colonial-style scientific forestry owes to forestry curriculum and pedagogy that preserve, rather than disrupt, its core tenets. It creates foresters who have acquired dispositions that predispose them towards practices couched in scientific forestry imaginations. The curriculum and pedagogy create and reinforce the current dogma in the forest management field that privileges scientific forestry knowledge. Decolonizing forestry practices thus presupposes a decolonization of the forestry academy. For that, we argue that the forestry academy must focus on constant reformulation of problems and interrogation of dominant views that are taken for granted. Currently, debates on decolonization of forestry academy are lacking in Tanzania, partly because the symbolic violence wrought by it is misrecognized. Our study constitutes a call for igniting such debates that constitute a necessary step towards a meaningful rethinking of forestry education and policy. This, in turn, may contribute towards nurturing forestry practices that align with official forest policy ambitions of ecological and socio-economic sustainability.

**KEYWORDS:** scientific forestry, pedagogy, curriculum, habitus, symbolic violence, decolonization, Tanzania

## **Rethinking forestry education - transformative learning for a common future**

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Previous hierarchical governance of forest resources has ostensibly given way to more participatory approaches emphasizing inclusive solutions for forested landscapes that support diverse livelihoods and business sectors. However, strong structural and commercial interests in favor of traditional forestry practices persist. Processes towards finding common solutions requires new ways of thinking about forestry and the landscape. Participation in forest-related decision-making is often orchestrated by intermediaries, by forestry experts and professionals that can greatly influence the process. Their individual interpretations and perspectives are therefore of importance. The question asked is how forestry education can foster collaborative practices in support of participatory democracy in the forest sector.

Globally, higher-education of foresters remains predominantly oriented towards learning subject-specific knowledge and skills such as biology, ecology, wood technology and forest economics. These are competencies relevant for the market, but not necessarily the type of personal abilities and skills needed to foster a collaborative practice in support of participatory democracy. A common understanding of problems and solutions presupposes awareness and understanding of one's own perceptions and norms. Transformative learning aims to raise students' self-awareness and self-reflection, and help the individual to become a more autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purposes rather than to uncritically act upon those of others. Such learning is central to citizenship in a modern democracy where effective collaborative problem-posing and -solving is needed. The learning thus becomes a political act that challenges dominant interests and epistemologies.

By introducing more transformative learning elements in the curricula of forestry higher-education and fostering a collaborative practice the mismatch between educational training and the need for more participatory democracy can be at least partially overcome. The presentation will critically examine practical findings of a transformative learning intervention, and convey challenges and opportunities to integrating such elements in regular forest higher-education curricula.

## **Donor-funded schemes of bureaucratic domination and elite capture in Nepal's community forestry sector**

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Through a literature review of the history of community forestry and in-depth interviews with key informants we trace and evaluate the governance effects of dominant technical forest management narratives. Donor support to community forestry in Nepal began in the early 1990s, accelerated after the 1993 Forest Act, which legalised the present form of community forestry, and culminated in 2015. Today, external support is minimal. In the early 1990s, donors focussed on supporting forest restoration, forest protection, and a strengthening of traditional knowledge and skills. However, the Joint Technical Review of Community Forestry in 1999 promoted a rational idea: Generating benefits to community forest user groups and society at large through sustainable harvesting, mainly of timber. Thus, in 2001, international technical and financial support shifted towards active forest management which helped institutionalising inventory and technical requirements in community forest management planning. Donor assistance included policy and guideline formulation, preparation of new as well as revisions of existing community forest management plans, all of which generated a regime of technical domination. In early 2010, this approach was taken a step further when the principles of systematic forest management in colonial India were re-branded as “scientific”. The following expansion of technically complex community forest management planning was only possible due to substantial donor support. Intentionally or not, the technical narrative-driven requirements for increasingly complicated growing stock estimations and harvesting regimes as the basis for official and permanent transfers of forest rights to community forest user groups has served two main purposes. First, it necessitated substantial external support the size of which donors could justify by the technical narrative itself and by the resulting permanent change in forest tenure. Second, it established ample opportunities for ‘technical-sounding’ as well as ‘legal-sounding’ re-centralisation of forest resources and associated revenues. We conclude that, in practice, “scientific” forestry defies the very objectives of community forestry because it is silviculturally unwise and utterly uneconomic to forest user groups. Furthermore, it nurtures elite capture and self-oppression of already marginalised people within communities and undermines the autonomy of community forest user groups vis á vis the forest bureaucracy.

## **Reinvention and reproduction in Serbian forestry**

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Recent decades have seen a seemingly endless stream of forest policy initiatives, such as forestry certification, participatory forestry, REDD+, and timber legality verification, that have had ramifications for people and forests across the World. Ostensibly, these initiatives seek to ensure sustainable use and management of forests. However, research suggests that the translation of political commitments and policy goals into substantial changes on the ground has been limited. This study explores the manifestation of this problem by looking into interventions and outcomes of new Serbian forest policy initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable forest management and multifunctional forestry. Although much has changed in Serbia since the 1990s, most new interventions and arrangements in forestry still involve the narrow vision of scientific forestry emphasizing timber production. Inspired by Tania Li's "will to improve" and insights from Science and Technology Studies; and based on fieldwork, interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study examines how Serbian forests have been characterized and problematized, and the initiatives that have been launched to shape their management and use. It shows how, despite general commitment to create mutual benefits for environment and various forest users, the "will to improve" Serbian forests was nevertheless constructed in ways that prioritize the state over other forest owners, and timber over multiple other forest uses and values. It further shows that Serbian forest policy is not aimed exclusively at improving and protecting forests, but also at addressing other social and economic goals. Politics, history and previous forestry programs continue to affect how forests are perceived and managed, so despite new framings of sustainability and environmental concerns there are very few fundamental changes in the ways forest management is actually practiced. This study finds that problem setting, knowledge and technical interventions in forestry are intrinsically linked with wider political, economic, social and historical contexts; and how lack of awareness of these linkages can result in incongruous interventions and outcomes. It thus suggests that inquiry into forest policies focus more on analyzing the rationales behind specific interventions.