

Local environmental NGO roles in the biodiversity governance: Czech-German comparison

Summary

The purpose of the presented research is to find out under what circumstances local environmental NGOs can serve as an effective complement to the state biodiversity protection within a certain territory. The continuous evolution of the NGO sector and its ability to effectively replace government agency services seems to be one of the recent transformation waves in the environmental governance. The large difference in this evolution can be detected among particular countries. Within our research we have focused on the biodiversity management practices in the cross-border Czech-German mountain region to reveal what factors determine the impact of NGOs and what strategies help them to pursue their agenda in the long-term. We have undertaken four in-depth case-studies (2 on the Czech side and 2 on the German side) following the outline of the IAD Framework to reach better compatibility.

Abstract

Recently, the role of NGOs in environmental governance has been widely investigated especially regarding the issue of mandatory public participation in policy-making in the European context (see e.g. Niedzialkowski et al. 2012a, Cent et al. 2013, Koontz and Newig 2014 among many others). In such processes NGOs also serve as intermediaries among public officials and fragmented society. The evaluation of their performance, however, is strongly dependent on the social context (e.g. post-totalitarian or democratic reality) and the scale (local, national, global) on which they operate. Whereas authors studying the role of NGOs in post-communist countries rather stress advantages of the abrupt development of the civil society and the increasing influence of NGOs (Carmin 2003, O'Brian 2011, Niedzialkowski et al. 2012b), others point out issues of accountability, legitimacy and transparency of the public decision-making that might be threatened by the NGO participation overkill (Newig and Kvarda 2012, Spangenberg 2014). Some researchers view the very existence of NGOs as the government accountability deficit (Dombrowski 2010). Further the role of local NGOs deeply anchored in society structures is viewed differently than the one of large international entities. Overall, the assessment of the environmental NGO (further referred as ENGOs) performance is puzzled depending on various factors, but also different authors' perceptions.

Within our research we would like to redirect the scientific attention from the pure participation of ENGOs in decision-making to their field actions – i.e. to the role they play in

the real natural resource management and preferably at the local level. We also do not presume what ENGOs should do, but rather what they actually do, why and what internal and external factors shape their actions. Our goal is to re-frame the understanding of different ENGO situations based on criteria of scale and influence and to answer following questions: Under what circumstances can ENGOs serve as an effective complement to the state biodiversity protection? What factors determine their impact in reaching biodiversity governance goals? What strategies help them to successfully pursue their agenda in the long-term?

The framing of ENGO roles and situations is developed based on rigorous literature review. Determining factors have been investigated through the series of four in-depth case studies. The field research is situated in Czech-German border mountain region called Eastern Ore Mountains. For the unified description of rules and positions of particular actors, IAD Framework was applied. The method has been widely used to study complex socio-ecological situations and it helps to describe them in a way that all important features and links are captured (Ostrom 2004). The essence of the method application is grounded in the detailed mapping of framework categories such as action arenas that determines boundaries of an investigated socio-ecological system, actors, their situation and patterns of interactions their pursue.

Literature:

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