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## THE SOUTHERN EUROPE FOREST OWNERS UNION AND THE EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT PATH

Under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization, forest policies have been regionalized according to forest areas and political borders. Global economic and development goals have also shaped forest policies and made private, public and collective actors work together on specific territories. Indeed, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) stems from just such a process of regionalization. The MCPFE manages various types of forests from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. Thus, the issue of forest regulation hinges upon its territorial dimension.

The Southern Europe Forests Owners' Union (SEFOU) gathers together forest owners from South West France, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Its purpose is to represent the interests of forest owners and promote their vision of sustainable forest management within a plurality of European and world arenas dominated by states, major lobby organizations and NGOs. In so doing, the SEFOU is active in lobbying at all the territorial levels, in processes of politicization/depolicitization and in the choice and implementation of regulatory instruments (Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2004). Its purpose is also to provide technical, economic and legal information to its members.

My approach to studying this organization is grounded on three aspects that stem from the concept of regulation. First, public, collective and private actors coproduce this regulation. Secondly, the regulation of the global economy focuses more on industries and sectors and not on specific firms. Finally, issues constructed by actors are problematized (Rocheftort and Cobb, 1994) and politicized (Lagroye, 2003) in very different ways. For this reason, territories are seen here as social constructions that are mobilized during the production and the legitimization of regulation (Carter and Smith, 2008). Overall, then, each industry is

conceptualized as governed by the interaction of multiple actors who promote their respective interests – interests that are shaped by localised perceptions of reality.

My approach to territory avoids multilevel governance studies. Multilevel governance studies would have led to a vertical understanding of the interests and political work undertaken within the forestry sector. Instead, ‘territorial institutionalism’ (Carter and Smith, 2008) transcends these vertical levels in order to grasp how representatives of regional sectors often evade their respective central state in order to self represent independently at the EU level. Industries are not just stages of transmission in a decision making process but dynamic orders. References to territory can lock in the order’s legitimacy to promote specific interests, policy choices in a sectoral continuity and/or be source of endogenous institutional change (Carter, 2007).

It follows that the triangulation of actors and interests (Badie, 1997) provides a means of describing the bargaining among interests and construction of public issues. Such an approach focuses on the actors’ ability to value and to impose rules.

European sustainable forest management has to integrate local particularities of forests, in particular their economic and political usages. The European forest industry is itself engaged in a path of world and European competitiveness (d’Antin de Vaillac, 2008). Seen from this perspective, actors bargain over the operational framework for action (eg. through developing coordinated approaches and shared forestry experiences)

In studying SEFOU in relation to the historical path of European forestry, this paper successively endeavours to describe how it legitimizes its action on its own territory (I) in order to participate in the politicization of forest management at the European and worldwide scales (II).

#### I. The legitimization of the SEFOU in the European forests management process

Grasping how each sector defines the frontiers of public policy helps to understand that sector’s specific approach of territory and how, over time, this categorization has been used to justify such boundaries and set ‘assignments of authority’ (Carter and Smith, 2008).

At the European scale, forests contain as much ecosystemic diversity as they do of usages. The forests of Europe remain part of the agricultural field but do not belong to the Common Agricultural Policy. Indeed, European measurements of forests have gradually changed from

a logic of reaction to that of more strategic orientations. However, this change remains unclear or even fuzzy in many cases and nearly always remains subjugated to industrial and environmental pressures.

In 1986, following the impact of acid rain on European forests, the European Council realized in concrete fashion how industries could impact upon the environment. It noted in particular its *a posteriori* impotence over environmental accidents. It therefore decided to create an inspection network of forests: the Standing Forestry Committee, created in 1989, represents the forest administrations of the Member States. It is a body of consultation, management and exchange for specific forest measures.

Then, in 1992, the Commission attacked the causes of fires and installed measurements of risk prevention and classification by area (Pinaudeau, 2008). Since this date the bases of the protection of forests have been laid by bringing together the various national services.

Subsequently, the EU extended its approach by integrating, on one hand, the health of forests, while, on the other, creating the foundation for an integrated regional approach of forestry sustainability.

Thus, in 1998, the Council of the European Union presented a resolution on a forestry strategy. The Council focused its recommendations on the elements which it considered fundamental for a sustainable forest management of the forests of the EU (multiple functions, subsidiarity, shared responsibility, active participation in the international processes, the need for improving coordination, co-operation and communication between the EU and the Member States, the need for a better integration of forests and their products into intersectorial policies in order to take account of reciprocal effects, and finally employment). The Commission prolonged its Strategy in 2006 through the Forest Action plan (2007-2011).

A pan European process for sustainable forest management was initiated in 1989 by France and Finland (CMPFE). It gathers together the European States and the EU in order to jointly apprehend forestry issues. NonEuropean countries as well as international and civil organizations also take part in it as observers.

This process has occurred in an international context which, since the 1992 Conference of the United Nations for the Environment and the Development, has made the sustainable management of the natural resources a priority. Since 2001, the CMPFE has been an observer at the Forum of the United Nations on the Forests, which confers it a high level position in the world governorship of the forests.

Launched in Helsinki, the PanEuropean process testifies to the influence of Scandinavian industry in the development of forestry and environmental standards (d'Antin de Vaillac, 2008).

At the end of the 1990s, two certification schemes—FSC and PEFC—thereby became inescapable. Supported by environmental NGOs, proponents of these schemes imposed their vision of forestry responsibility upon other actors. Since then, forest owners and industrial actors have therefore had to reconcile their objectives and means with the requirements of certification.

The EU forestry action has produced relevant and comprehensible indicators which have established a common vocabulary for all Europe. It also has institutionalized a holistic role to the forest, and this despite the variety of its status. In the forestry field, what is part of agriculture is not always clearly distinguishable from what concerns the environment and rural development. Thus, the financing funds remain fragmented. The European Forest Action Plan corresponds to a European preference for the environment (Läidi, 2005; Petiteville, 2006) but does not have the capacity of constraint and harmonization that a directive would have. Therefore, instruments of study and forest management have declined locally within a flexible framework of coordination between member States or candidates. However, geographic information systems as well as data processing have yet to be homogenized. Data could be understood in several ways because of the various uses of vocabulary. At the European scale, there are no formal categories to distinguish what is considered to be part of the field of the protective forest and its multiple uses. Neither are threats to forests understood unanimously. Forestry strategy could progress with a European definition of each dimension of forestry and by a formalization of the respective competences of Member States and EU administrations. From this point of view, and because it is made up of several types of forest, the EU has not succeeded in defining the concept of the forest on a continental scale, and this notwithstanding the importance of its work of coordination and co-operation between actors and areas. Consequently, local, regional and transnational strategies continue to be developed. These multiple trajectories can compete amongst themselves, even to the point of weakening some local economies and dissolving specific approaches of forest sustainability within general considerations. Consequently, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the regulation of the forest economy using only the postulate of a multilevel governorship.

Indeed, the EU circumvents the inherent difficulties of a regionalized SFM with a top-down approach and subsidiarity mix. Instead, EU texts harmonize National Forest Programs. The generalized and historical acceptance of a sustainable multiple function forestry makes the work of preparing Community guidelines easier. Within such articulations of policy, however, sustainability is not commonly heard. Instead, sectoral actors have promoted their respective interests in such a European political and economic environment.

Legitimacy to promote sectoral interest stems from the socio-economic and political insertion in specific territories. Their respective representatives dramatize their own representativeness by evoking territory in their public discourse (Abélès, 1996; Carter and Smith, 2008). Indeed, the SEFOU transforms socio-economic and political territory into a symbol (Carter and Smith, 2008), one that operates as much in the national sphere as it does in the supranational one, and this to evade the central state in order to promote interests in the EU decision making arena.

## II. Territory and the politization of the forest

This legitimation does not only legitimate an endogenous territorial political order but also takes part in the very construction of the political object -“the forest”- and in the definition of the framework of SFM within a system of European and worldwide actors. These multiple actors hold different representations of the direction which the regulation of the European and world economy-policy of the forests must take. Consequently, the SEFOU’s political work within the institutional forest order is undertaken using a transversal approach and trans-regional coordination.

Reference to territory guides the action of the SEFOU and provides a resource of material power (industry and linked sectoral firms, growth, employment) and immaterial power (identity, legitimacy and local forestry history) that can be used within the arguments presented in the name of the general interest (Carter and Smith, 2008). “The objective of such a reference to territory is to thwart logics of sectoral appropriation” (March and Olsen, 1989), in particular at the European level.

The SEFOU grounds its forestry approach on knowledge produced by the European Institute of the Cultivated Forest (EICF), a scientific body of research on the sustainable management of the Atlantic forests. Along with representatives of Ireland and United Kingdom, the EICF

coordinates research programs related to the scientific and socio economic aspects of forestry regulation— the prevention of fires (the CEDRE program), the incidences of climatic change (the REINFORCE program) or the development of the criteria and indicators of SFM (FORSEE program) —which fall under a European perspective, and not just a local one. If empirical work also relate to the forests of the south of Europe, the EICF's objectives answer to the European Community expectations and issues.

This intermediate body of expertise allows the SEFOU to obtain independent results from protocols of research targeted on the Atlantic forests. This scientific work provides a state of the European southern forests which results from comparative and prospective studies undertaken on various SFM grounds. This knowledge allows a better political representation of interests. Thus, while questioning or exploring variables that until now have been largely ignored, put aside or reduced to global changes, the SEFOU promotes an epistemic positioning towards other actors that is framed around the concept of 'natural stock management'.

In summary, the SEFOU's eligibility does not only result from being an association of its members. Rather it results from a work on a Southern European scale aimed at producing knowledge about the forests and forestry of these areas. It is this knowledge combined with a representation of reality and interests which structures the political representation of 'the forest'.

Legitimated in this way, the SEFOU integrates the major industrial organizations engaged in European public policies (MCPFE, EFI...) and in industrial lobbying (CEPI, CEI-wood), but also that takes place on a worldwide scale (FAO, Forum of the United Nations on the Forests). In the EU, "the relation between the territory and the territorialized sector affect permanently the processes of public action because their respective logics must systematically be reconciled" (Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2004).

While structuring themselves within this alliance, forest owners have given themselves the possibility of reaching the authorities of dialogue and influencing the choice and implementation of instruments which up to now have been influenced by the governments of Scandinavian and Germanic industries of the forest, wood and paper. The SEFOU thus participates in the strategies of politizing and depoliticizing of 'the forest' as an object of sustainable management.

The SEFOU's legitimacy thus corresponds to a political stabilization of the sector for the South of Europe and makes possible the construction of a common social representation of

reality (Hall, 1986). Ie. it is a constructed and stabilized sector which makes possible the adoption of regulatory instruments that many actors consider 'efficient' (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994).

In summary, strategies arise from alliances within the SEFOU. Such representativeness makes it possible for this organization to develop its own positioning, to take part in sectoral coalitions and to be freed from extra sectoral interests. It does not follow, however, that such a coalition seeks to emancipate itself from the SFM, from the European preference for environmental protection or competitiveness and also from the forest multi-sectoral issues. Instead, the argument made here is that such a coalition of interests participates in approaches to forest management which are developed outside their own territory. Adaptation to climate change, the prevention of fires or the criteria and indicators of certification schemes provide many examples of the commitment to progress in sustainable management made by the actors concerned.

### Conclusion

The SEFOU is an institutionalized order grounded in a territorial legitimacy which both contains and participates in multiple forms of governance. The study of such a politicization process reveals how "representations of territory play a significant part in how actors interpret their interests" (Carter and Smith, 2008). Moreover, the SEFOU promotes a shared transregional construction of the forestry concept for Southern Europe which has generated material and immaterial resources to implement its goals. By underlining the importance of territory in the social representation of reality and the definition of actor interests, this paper has also highlighted the importance of integrating analysis of this kind of alliance within studies of regionalized forest policies.

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