

Chapter 18: Examining the 'participatory turn' in forestry governance – what potential does it hold for a green and just transitions?

Key Messages

Perspectives

- Governance of public forests (92% of forests in Canada) is frequently contested due to competing land use values (timber extraction, carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, amongst others).
- Indigenous claims to enhanced authority and benefits represents another key area for negotiation.
- Many contend that participatory approaches are a key towards broadening scope of forest management and building social consensus. Since the 1990s provinces have introduced legal requirements in this direction, however these rarely challenge the industrial forestry approach nor undermine the historical bilateralism between government and the forest industry.
- Requirements for engagement with Indigenous peoples, whether through constitutional protections or UNDRIP are more stringent, and have led to some institutional innovations.

Processes

- Forestry governance is characterized by large-scale industrial tenures allocated to private forestry companies. Consultation mechanisms are predominantly based in information sharing and citizen advisory groups. Research indicates little transformational change – there is a strong operational focus and a tendency to depoliticize forestry debates. There are also challenges with representation and legitimacy outside of elite interest groups.
- Processes with Indigenous nations are based in bilateral consultations, however there is a similar tendency towards operational rather than a strategic focus. Indigenous communities are under-resourced and overextended by consultation requests.
- Co-management represents the exception rather than the rule, but holds interesting lessons in terms of design principles and enhanced sharing of authority.

Policies

- Institutional innovations in the area of Indigenous engagement are linked to court challenges (Ex: Haida Nation, James Bay Crees) and subsequent nation-to-nation agreements. Two noteworthy examples are the Paix des Braves Agreement (Cree Nation) and Kunst'aa guu-Kunst'aayah Reconciliation Protocol (Haida Nation), which include enhanced consultation and/or shared decision-making at strategic policy levels.
- Diversification of the tenure regime (community-based models, Indigenous tenures) has been relatively stagnant since the early 2000s, with the exception of British Columbia which continues to support a broader set of licenses with non-industrial actors, albeit at a modest scale.

Recommendations

- Stronger commitment to tenure diversification
- Pursuing enhanced consultation and where possible co-management agreements with Indigenous nations
- Experimentation with new forms of deliberative practices within public participation in the forest sector.