

Converting Social Capital into Political Capital
How do local communities gain political influence?
A theoretical approach and empirical evidence
from Thailand and Columbia

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Abstract

The concept of social capital has attracted increasing attention in the study of common property, collective action, and natural resource management. Compared to related concepts, such as social networks, norms and trust, social capital is compatible with the concepts of physical, human and natural capital, thus allowing to relate the social, the economic and the ecological sphere. This paper proposes a concept of political capital, which permits to integrate the political sphere, as well, and allows to analyze how local communities can use social capital to achieve political objectives. Drawing on the work of political resource theorists, the paper distinguishes between instrumental and structural political capital. Instrumental political capital is defined in the actors' perspective as the resources which actors can use to influence policy formation processes and realize outcomes in their interest. Structural political capital is defined in the public perspective and refers to variables of the political system which condition the actors' possibilities to accumulate instrumental political capital and to use it effectively. On this basis, the paper develops an analytical framework which focuses on the transformation of social into political capital. To study this capital transformation, the paper integrates Bourdieu's concept of social capital, which has been somewhat neglected by those using the social capital approach to study common property and natural resource management. Two case studies, one from Thailand and one from Columbia, illustrate the application of the framework. In a macro-political perspective, the Thailand case deals with the devolution of authority in forest management, while the Columbian case adopts a micro-political perspective and deals with the labor policies of multinational firms. The paper concludes that the proposed framework allows to integrate arguments which have been put forward by different schools of thought, such as pluralist, statist and political conflict theories. The framework also allows to accommodate the role of knowledge, ideology and discourse, which are particularly relevant for environmental policy formation. To further develop the proposed framework, the paper suggests to explore how analytical tools used in investment theory, principal-agent theory and transaction cost economics can be applied to political capital.

1 Introduction

“Thus, through much of Western Germany by the later middle ages the peasantry had succeeded, through protracted struggle on a piece-meal village-by-village basis, in constituting for itself an impressive network of village institutions for economic regulation and village self-government. These provided a powerful line of defence against the incursions of the landlords. In the first instance, peasant organisation and peasant resistance to the lords appear to have been closely bound up with the very development of the quasi-communal character of the village economy. Most fundamental was the need to regulate co-operatively the village commons and to struggle against the lords to establish and protect commons rights - common lands and the common-field organization of agricultural rotation.... Sooner or later, however, issues of a more general economic and political character tended to be raised. ...Perhaps most significantly, in many places [the peasants] fought successfully to replace the old landlord-installed village mayor (*Schultheiss*) by their own elected village magistrates. (Brenner 1976: 56-57).

In his seminal article “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” Brenner (1976) describes a theme which is explored in this paper: Social capital formed by villagers for the purpose of communal resource management is converted into political capital and used in their struggle against domination – in Brenner’s case with remarkable success. The peasants of Western Europe were able to abolish serfdom – unlike their peasant fellows in Eastern Europe, who – in the absence of communally managed natural resources – did not have such social capital, which could have been converted into political capital. In this paper, we explore the analytical power of the idea to convert social into political capital for a better understanding of the struggles of peasants for power in contemporary societies.

The concept of social capital has received increasing attention in sociology, economics, education and related disciplines.¹ In the development-oriented literature, the World Bank and international development research institutions have contributed substantially to popularizing this concept.² From the perspective of economics, social capital has two distinctive advantages contributing to its increasing use: (1) As capital is essentially an economic concept, social capital allows to include social factors into a coherent analytical framework based on economic, human, natural and social capital. (2) The concept of social capital allows to analyze social issues in a quantitative way³ and to include them into econometric models.⁴ From the perspective of mainstream economics, this is a comparative advantage of the social capital concept over concepts of the New Institutional Economics, such as informal and formal institutions of collective action, which can be applied to the same issues.

For the study of common property and community-based natural resource management, social capital has also been recognized as a useful concept.⁵ Considering the different sources of social capital in the sociological literature, one can distinguish two major approaches, which differ essentially with concerning underlying theory and empirical application. Referring to their most important proponents, we label them here the Bourdieu approach and the Putnam approach.

¹ Wall et al. (1998 : 301) found that the number of journal articles listing social capital as identifier increased from 14 in the period between 1981-85 to 109 in the period 1991-95.

² See, for example, the “Social Capital Homepage” of the World Bank at <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/index.htm>.

³ Wall et al. (1998: 319) note in their review article that social capital is in all disciplines surveyed (sociology, economics, education, psychology, agriculture, etc.) almost exclusively applied in a quantitative way.

⁴ See, for example, Zeller et al. (1999).

⁵ See, for example, Ostrom 1994, Bebbington 1997 and Grootaert 1998.

Interestingly, the application of social capital in economics and natural resource management discussed above has almost exclusively neglected Bourdieu's approach.

In this paper, we propose to extend the analytical framework created by the combination of the concepts of social, economic (physical), human and natural capital by including the concept of political capital. We argue that this concept allows to achieve a better understanding of the essentially political processes which may – or may not – lead to the change of resource management regimes. We intend to show that the concept is particularly useful to analyze processes of decentralization and devolution, which have increasingly attracted the attention of economists, political scientists and scholars dealing with common property. We stress that the focus of the proposed approach is a positive analysis of policy formation processes, not a normative analysis of policies. Our approach focuses on questions such as: Why does devolution happen? – Why does it not happen? – To which extent does it happen?, rather than on the question: Why should devolution happen – or to which extent should it happen?⁶ A crucial point throughout the analysis is the transformation of social into political capital. We argue that – to study this transformation – it is essential to consider both the Bourdieu and the Putnam approach of social capital.

The paper is organized as follows: Chapter 2 develops the analytical framework. It starts with a review of the concept of social capital and then outlines the concept of political capital, before discussing the transformation of social into political capital and developing an analytical framework on this basis. Chapter 3 illustrates the application of the framework using the case of the devolution in Thailand's forestry sector. Chapter 4 uses the labor policies of multi-national oil companies in Columbia for illustration. Finally, Chapter 5 draws some conclusions.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concepts of Social Capital

Prior to specifying the concept of social capital to be used throughout this paper, we compare the concepts of social capital developed by Bourdieu and Putnam.

In his work on the different forms of capital, Bourdieu (1992)⁷ stresses the need to understand the social world as an accumulated history, which cannot be reduced to an addition of short mechanical equilibria. To avoid such a reduction, Bourdieu suggests to re-introduce the concepts of capital and capital accumulation with all their implications (Bourdieu 1992: 49). Bourdieu distinguishes economic, cultural and social capital. His concept of economic capital is similar to that used by economists. Bourdieu's cultural capital includes what economists consider as human capital, but it is a wider concept. Bourdieu (1992: 63) defines social capital as the totality of all actual and potential resources associated with the possession of a lasting network of more or less institutionalized relations of knowing or respecting each other. His concept of social capital encompasses the resources derived from one's belonging to a group. Relations of social capital may exist on the basis of material and/or symbolic relations of exchange, they may also be institutionalized and expressed by a name or title which shows one's belonging to a family, clan, nobility, party, and so forth. Exclusive groups intend to concentrate social capital and use

⁶ Agrawal & Ostrom (1999) emphasize the need to deal with this question.

⁷ We refer to the article "Ökonomisches Kapital, Kulturelles Kapital, Soziales Kapital" published 1992 in German language. (Translation from French into German by J.Bolder, from German into English for the purpose of this paper by the authors).

mechanisms like marriage regulations or initialization rites to avoid “dilution,” which would reduce the privilege (social capital) arising from group membership. According to Bourdieu (1992: 64), the amount of social capital held by an individual depends on the extent he or she can mobilize a social network, and from the capital (including the economic, cultural or symbolic capital) held by the members of that network. Bourdieu (1992: 76) states that he introduced the concept of social capital neither for pure theoretical considerations nor as a mere parallelism to economic capital. He used the concept to explain why persons holding similar economic and cultural capital differ considerably in their achievements, depending on the extent to which they are able to mobilize the capital of a more or less institutionalized group for their purposes (family, nobility, education in an elite school, membership in an exclusive club, etc.). Consequently, Bourdieu’s concept of social capital has widely been used in the study of social inequality and hierarchical social structures. As Wall et al. (1998: 305) note, social capital as a means to exclude others from access to resources has been a major focus of those influenced by Bourdieu.

Putnam discusses the concept of social capital extensively in the final chapter of his seminal work “Making Democracy Work” (1993), which explores the conditions for creating responsive and effective democratic institutions. After discussing the dilemmas of collective action in their different versions (tragedy of the commons, public good, logic of collective action, prisoner’s dilemma), Putnam points out that the features of social organizations, such as trust, norms, and networks, can considerably improve a society’s efficiency in overcoming dilemmas of collective action. He uses the term social capital to refer to these features (Putnam 1993: 167) and stresses – as a special attribute of social capital – “that it is ordinarily a public good, unlike conventional capital, which is ordinarily a private good.” (Putnam 1993: 170). Referring to the nature of social capital as an attribute of the social structure in which a person is embedded, he emphasizes that social capital is “not the private property of any of the persons who benefit from it” (Putnam 1993: 170). The difference of his perspective to that of Bourdieu could not be more striking. Putnam argues that “networks of civic engagement” like neighborhood associations, choral societies and sports clubs, represent horizontal interactions which essentially promote such trust, reciprocity and co-operation within the society. In contrast, vertical networks such as patron-client relationships, can – according to Putnam – not sustain social trust and co-operation, they rather tend to undermine solidarity, especially among clients (Putnam 1993: 174-175). Putnam traces back the divergent development patterns – described as self-enforcing equilibria - of Northern and Southern Italy to the different types of networks they have inherited: predominantly horizontal networks promoting trust and social co-operation – social capital in Putnam’s sense - in the North, and the mostly vertical networks in the South, which did not lead to the creation of social capital and determined the “tragic fate of southern Italy for a millennium” (Putnam 1993: 178). In essence, the approach of Putnam, like that of Coleman (1988) and others influenced by their work, tends to be conservative, emphasizing positive aspects of social control (Wall et al. 1998: 313). Bourdieu’s approach represents a more critical view of society, as outlined above.⁸

The Bourdieu and the Putnam approach to social capital can well be synthesized by considering them as *two different perspectives on the same subject*. Drawing on the conventional distinction between private and public goods in economic theory, we consider Bourdieu’s

⁸ Putnam (1993a) also acknowledges that not all social networks have a positive impact on society.

approach as the private perspective and the Putnam approach as the public perspective on social capital. For the framework developed here, both perspectives will be applied. As we focus on political actors, who are often organized groups rather than individuals, we use in the following the term “actor’s perspective” instead of private perspective. As the concept of social capital is not confined to positive features, we also include in our framework what Rubio (1997) has called “perverse social capital”: organizations such as the Mafia which reward rent-seeking and criminal activity.

2.2 Concepts of Political Capital

As a theoretical or analytical concept, political capital has apparently not gained wide currency, in political sciences, political economy or any related discipline. The term is hardly found in any handbook or dictionary of political sciences,⁹ but frequently used by journalists in the expression “to make political capital” of some event, with a connotation of taking an unfair advantage of this event. This expression is found in Safire’s Political Dictionary (1978: 547-548). The dictionary traces back the phrase as far as 1842 and points out that “its frequent current use makes this phrase an important political Americanism”.¹⁰ Kessler (1998) uses the term in this sense in the title of his paper “Political Capital: Mexican Financial Policy under Salinas.” The paper explains certain policy contradictions in Mexico’s financial policy as response to the electoral challenges confronting the ruling party, but he does not explain or apply “political capital” as a theoretical concept. Booth & Richard (1998) use the term political capital in a study that reconsiders Putnam’s (1993) major argument that civil society, expressed in citizen organizational activity, contributes to successful governance and democracy. Like other authors, they criticize that Putnam failed to specify how civil society impinges upon government as he never elucidates how group involvement affects citizen behavior or attitudes so as to influence government performance or enhance prospects for democracy (Booth & Richard 1998: 782). They hold that associational activism, in order to have political significance, must foster attitudes and behaviors that actually influence political regimes. The authors use the term “political capital” to label such “state-impinging attitudes and activities” (Booth & Richard 1998: 782). In their quantitative analysis of the relations between society activism, social capital, political capital and levels of regime democracy in Central America, they use four measures of political capital: democratic norms, voting, campaign activism and contacting public officials. They conclude that political capital rather than social capital links formal group activism to democracy in Central America. The paper indicates the usefulness of political capital as an analytical concept but it does not contain further theoretical considerations on this concept or references to other authors using this term.

We propose here a conception of political capital which is closely related to the concept of political resources,¹¹ as developed by Hicks & Misra (1993) and Leicht & Jenkins (1998).¹²

⁹ “Political capital” as an entry is not found in any of the following handbooks or dictionaries of political sciences: Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics (McLean 1996), A New Handbook of Political Science (Goodin & Klingemann 1996), International Encyclopedia of Government and Politics (Magill 1996), A Dictionary of Modern Politics (Robertson 1993), Dictionary of Politics (Raymond 1992), Encyclopedia of Government and Politics (Hawkesworth & Leogan 1992), The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Science (Bogdanov 1991), The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought (Miller 1991), The Public Policy Dictionary (Kruschke & Jackson 1987), The Dictionary of Political Analysis (Plumo et al. 1982), and A Dictionary of Political Thought (Swinton 1982).

¹⁰ An equivalent expression is also frequently used in German: “*politisches Kapital schlagen aus ...*”

¹¹ This is a parallelism to the concept of social capital, which is also related to the concept of social resources (Wall

Hicks & Misra (1993) quote a wide range of resource theories in politics which “share a focus on the empowering role of resources for the realization of outcomes that advance the authors perceived interests” (Hicks & Misra, 1993: 671). The volume *Macropolitical Theory of the Handbook of Political Science* (Greenstein & Polsby 1975) refers to political resources in this sense in the entry on “Governments and Political Oppositions” by Dahl (1975).

Hicks & Misra (1993) used the concept of political resources to build a coherent framework for analyzing welfare spending, which allowed them to integrate the theoretical arguments put forward by four different perspectives in political sciences: pluralist, statist, mass political conflict and social democrat perspectives. Adopting a refinement of resource theory introduced by Rogers (1974), the authors distinguish between instrumental resources, defined as “specific resources used by specific authors to realize their perceived interests”, and infra-resources, defined as “resources that broadly facilitate diverse actors’ pursuits of their interests by empowering their actions or conditioning the effectiveness of specific instrumental resources” (Hicks & Misra 1993: 672). In order to explain factors influencing welfare spending, the authors consider, for example, the following instrumental resources, which may be in the hands of pro- or anti-welfare spending actors: sub-governmental administrative authority (a factor stressed by statist theories), interest organizations and electoral leverage (a factor stressed by pluralist theories) and disruptive leverage (a factor stressed by political conflict theories). Infra-resources considered by Hicks & Misra as relevant for welfare spending include, for example, state fiscal capacity and state internal organization. The authors construct different regression models, using instrumental resources and infra-resources as explaining variables.¹³ They are able to show that an integrated framework based on political resource theory has more explanatory power than pluralist, statist or class perspectives which focus only on a particular set of influencing factor in explaining policy formation. The authors are also able to show the empirical relevance of disruptive leverage emphasized by frequently neglected political conflict theories (Hicks & Misra 1993: 699). The political resource framework of Hicks & Misra was chosen as basis for the political capital concept proposed in this paper because it can be assumed that these advantages also apply to the policy areas of rural development and natural resource management.

Drawing on Hicks & Misra (1993), Leicht & Jenkins (1998) apply the political resource framework for analyzing the adoption of public venture capital programs in the American States. They add several additional refinements which we assume to be also relevant for the policy areas considered in this paper. Focusing on sub-national governments, the authors take account of the embeddedness of states into a common federal government and the competition between states for economic development. These factors may lead to “isomorphic pressure”¹⁴ in policy formation. Due to the effects of globalization, isomorphic pressures on policy formation may also occur at the national level. In the field of environmental policies, international organizations and international conventions and agreements may lead to isomorphism. Another extension of political resource theory added by Leicht & Jenkins is the influence of pacts between leaders of

et al., 1998: 301).

¹² Masters & Atkin (1996) also refer to political resources in their comparative study of US public sector unions in the 1980s. They mainly use the term to refer to financial resources raised by the unions for Political Action Committees in support of political candidates, but do not outline a theoretical framework concerning political resources.

¹³ The authors also take contextual mediations, such as macro-economic epoch into account.

¹⁴ Leicht & Jenkins (1998: 1327) draw on the idea of institutional isomorphism developed by DiMaggio & Powell (1991).

encompassing peak associations representing different interest groups or classes (e.g., meso-corporatist pacts between business and labor). The authors use event history methods (considering policy adoption as events) and develop models which explore especially the interaction between specific constellations of infra-resources and instrumental resources. Their results support the political resource idea that contextual combinations of infra-resources and instrumental resources are relevant for explaining policy adoption (Leicht & Jenkins 1998: 1336). In this paper, we draw on their expanded framework of political resource theory because it allows to take the influence of specific interactions between interest groups, local pressures as well as isomorphic global pressures on policy formation into account.

The distinction between instrumental resources and infra-resources in political resource theory parallels the distinction between the private perspective and the public perspective of social capital outlined above. Therefore, we use this distinction as the basis for the definition of political capital proposed in this paper: In the *private perspective*, political capital consists of the resources which an actor, i.e. an individual or a group, can dispose of and use to influence policy formation processes and realize outcomes which are in the actor's perceived interest. This definition of political capital corresponds to the instrumental resources in political resource theory. We therefore propose the term "instrumental political capital" to denominate the private perspective. As the term "private" is often associated with "individual," we use in the following the term "actors' perspective," taking into account that the actors in the political arena are often organizations. It is important to distinguish between the political capital held by actors empowered to make political decisions, e.g., the Members of Parliament (MPs), and the political capital held by other actors, such as organized interest groups. For reasons of scope, this difference cannot fully be explored in this paper.

In the *public perspective*, political capital refers to the structural variables of the political system which influence the possibilities of the diverse actors to accumulate instrumental political capital and condition the effectiveness of different types of instrumental political capital. The public perspective of political capital corresponds to the concept of infra-resources in political resource theory. We propose the term "structural political capital" to denominate the public perspective.

As in the case of social capital, our concept of structural political capital is not confined to positive features such as democratic political institutions, political openness, civil rights, etc. Just as there is "perverse social capital", there is also "perverse political capital," for example, in political systems which have institutions of repression. With regard to the actors' possibilities of using instrumental political capital, such a situation is quite different from political systems with a "vacuum" of political institutions (e.g., after the breakdown of a political regime). This neutral definition of political capital avoids the shortcoming of many pluralist approaches, which are based on the assumption of a western-type of democratic political system and, therefore, only to a limited extent applicable to developing countries with different political systems.

To extend this framework derived from political resource theory, we consider the transformation of social into political capital as an additional factor explaining policy formation. For reasons of scope, other capital transformations are not subject to this paper, even though they may offer analytical clues, especially in the field of environmental politics. For example, political decision-makers who grant logging concessions to influential army figures transform (their country's) natural capital into (their personal) political capital.

A further advantage of the concept of political capital is that it allows to apply analytical

tools from *investment theory* to the analysis of political processes, for example, *portfolio diversification* (explaining why actors invest in different types of political capital), *depreciation* of political capital over time, sunk costs which may lead to *path dependency* after investing in particular forms of political capital, etc. The concept political capital also allows to apply tools used in the New Institutional Economics, for example, Williamson’s *transaction costs* theory (1986, 1998): Transaction costs arise, for example, for obtaining information on appropriate political decision-makers to “invest in,” and for monitoring the political decisions of the actors in which one has invested. *Principle agent problems* may arise due to opportunistic behavior of the agent (political decision-maker). The transaction costs for monitoring may be higher in environmental politics than in policy areas because the “output” - environmental quality - is influenced by many variables and difficult to assess because of long-term effects and uncertainty. Williamson’s theory could help to explain why actors chose to invest into certain types of political capital, assuming that they economize on transaction costs. It is, however, beyond of the scope of this paper to explore the application of these tools. The purpose of these considerations is rather to highlight the potential of political capital as an analytical concept.

2.3 Transformation of Social Capital into Political Capital

Applying both an actors’ (private) perspective and a public perspective to the concepts of social and political capital leads to the four-way classification outlined in Table 1. This classification is the basis for analyzing the transformation of social political capital. The structural parameters of the social and political system (public perspective) determine which type of social capital the diverse actors can accumulate, and to which extent they can transform (invest) it into different forms of political capital (actors’ perspective). The actors may differ in their capacity (entrepreneurship, innovativeness, etc.) to find efficient ways of capital transformation, especially when the structural parameters of the political and social systems are changing.

Table 1: Social and Political Capital Matrix

Perspective	Public perspective (structural capital)	Actors’ (private) perspective (instrumental capital)
Social Capital	Structural variables of the social system	Social capital held by actors
Political Capital	Structural variables of the political system	Political capital held by actors

Source: own representation

In principle, this framework can be used for qualitative case studies of particular policy formation processes, and for quantitative comparisons of policy outcomes across countries, sub-national governments and time periods. The authors quoted above used political resource theory or the political capital concept mostly for quantitative analyses.¹⁵ They could draw on a comprehensive body of theoretical and empirical literature for the policy areas (welfare spending, direct state interventions) they studied. They used this literature to select the relevant variables, formulate hypotheses and specify the indicators and measurements used in their empirical work. In the policy fields of rural development and natural resource management in developing countries, the available literature on policy formation processes is less comprehensive. It is, therefore, suggested to use case studies as a first step to explore and refine the applicability of the concept

¹⁵ Likewise, the concept of social capital has predominantly been used in quantitative analyses (Wall et al. 1998: 315).

of political capital proposed here. Case studies will also be helpful to specify the variables, which can later be used for quantitative studies.

In this paper, we illustrate the case study application of the framework using a case from Thailand and one from Columbia. The two cases differ in perspective and policy area. The Thailand case deals in a macro-political perspective with the formation of forestry policies, while the Columbian case deals in a micro-political perspective with the labor policies of multinational firms. What both cases have in common is that they allow to better understand how rural communities can gain political influence in order to pursue their interests.

3 The Case of the Thailand's Community Forestry Bill

The case of Thailand's Community Forestry Bill has been selected because the efforts to pass this bill represent an important attempt of devolution in natural resource management in South-East Asia, even though the bill has not been enacted yet. The empirical information presented here is derived from secondary sources and interviews with NGOs and villagers' organizations (hereafter referred to as People's Organizations -POs), dealing with community forestry.¹⁶ This Chapter is organized as follows: The first section provides a brief overview of the history, current stage and contents of Community Forestry Bill. Applying the framework outlined in Chapter 2, the second section deals with the social capital held by the diverse actors involved, and the third section discusses how the actors converted their social into political capital.

3.1 Overview of the Policy Process

Efforts to enact a Community Forestry Bill in Thailand can be traced back to the resistance of local communities and NGOs against government-supported commercial forest plantations in the 1980s. A major triggering event for emergence of the Community Forestry Bill on the political agenda was the famous Huay Kaew case: An MP's wife leased forest land from the Royal Forest Department (for brevity hereafter referred to as Forest Department), supposedly degraded land for reforestation. However, the land was located in a forest area which had been well managed and maintained by the local community. In 1989, after public protests, the director-general of the Forest Department eventually withdrew the lease contract and - for the first time - publicly granted the village the right to manage their forest¹⁷. In the same year, a national NGO meeting formulated for the first time the demand for a Community Forestry Bill (Brenner et al. 1998: 16).

During the 1980s, the need for community participation in forest management was also increasingly recognized within the Forest Department because it became obvious that the

¹⁶ The interviews were held in connection with a consultancy to the "Sustainable Management of Resources in the Lower Mekong River Basin" Project (SMRP) in July and August 1999. I am thankful to Hans Helmrich and the SMRP team for institutional support and to all interviewed persons for sharing their views. The following organizations and projects involved in community forestry in Northern Thailand were included: Project for Recovery of Life and Culture, Hill Area Development Foundation, Northern Development Foundation, Inter-Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand, Dhammaanat Foundation for Conservation and Rural Development, CARE, several projects under the Royal Forest Department, and several Royal Projects. Financial support from GTZ is gratefully acknowledged. The empirical information presented here is part of an ongoing research project on devolution in natural resource management in Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. As political and administrative decision-makers have not yet been interviewed, this paper refers to secondary sources to assess their role in the policy formation process.

¹⁷ See Brenner et al. (1998: 16) and the report on the eighth anniversary celebration of the event in *The Nation*, 7/23/97, Section: Local, "Christians join in ordination of conservation site" by K. Sukin.

Department's manpower and budget were by far insufficient to rehabilitate and protect the country's forest rapidly declining forest resources (Pratong & Thomas 1990: 177). The National Forest Policy of 1985, widely considered as a mile stone document of government forest policy, clearly directed the Forest Department to encourage community participation and collaborate with civil society, private sector and other government agencies in forest management. Against this background of increasing public pressure for community forestry rights (Brenner et al. 1998) and changing perceptions within the bureaucracy (Pratong & Thomas, 1990), the Forest Department drafted the first version of a Community Forestry Bill in 1991/92. One year later, local groups prepared their own draft, which became known as People's Draft.¹⁸ In 1995, a committee consisting of government officials, experts, NGOs and local representatives was appointed to elaborate a joint draft, which was in principle approved by the Cabinet in 1996.

According to this draft, villagers can request the establishment of a community forest from a Provincial Community Forest Committee, comprising members of the provincial government and representatives of the Forest Department, NGOs, academics and local communities. Upon approval, the members of a community forest elect a Community Forestry Management Board, which is responsible of the management of the community forest according to a plan submitted to the provincial committee. The draft envisages to issue the rights to use, manage and protect the forest to the community, while a transfer of ownership rights is not foreseen. These institutional arrangements of community forest management – which represent in essence a co-management approach – were not controversial. The debate rather concentrated on the possibility to establish community forests in protected areas (National Parks, Wildlife Reserves and critical watershed areas), and on the activities to be allowed in such areas. This question is of particular importance for the mountain areas of Northern Thailand, where ethnic minority groups live in areas that have been classified as protected areas by the state. NGOs and POs representing these groups campaigned for the possibility of establishing community forests in protected areas, while conservation-oriented NGOs and one farmers' organization representing lowland groups started to oppose this possibility.

In view of this controversy, a public hearing on the Community Forestry Bill was held in 1997, attended by more than 250 persons, including academics, Forest Department officials and representatives of NGOs and POs. The hearing did not lead to a consensus.¹⁹ Nevertheless a revised version of the draft was approved by the Cabinet in the same year. Upon protests by NGOs, Prime Minister Chuan Leepkai appointed a committee led by Laddawan Wongsriwong, MP from the Northern region (at that time member of the ruling Democrat Party), to revise the draft. After including the comments by the Forest Department, this version was approved by the Cabinet in October 1999. According to the Cabinet Spokesman (reported in *The Nation*, 10/6/99, "Controversial forest bill gets Cabinet okay" by P. Srivalo) and additional information from the Forest Department, this draft allows to establish community forests in conservation areas by communities which can prove that they conserved the forest area for at least five years before the Bill is enacted. This was an agreement reached by Wongsriwong's committee and agreed upon by the Forest Department. The draft also foresees that the authority to control community forest areas will rest with two committees, a national-level policy panel, to be chaired by the

¹⁸ See brochure prepared for the collection of 50,000 signatures published by the Community Forestry Bill (by the People) Support Committee, 1999.

¹⁹ See *The Nation*, 5/16/97, Section: Local, "No consensus on forest bill at public hearing - Opponents warn of disaster" by P. Hongthong.

Agriculture Minister, and a provincial-level committee, to be chaired by the governor. Both committees comprise members of the government, the administration, academics and representatives of NGOs and local community forestry committees. The draft approved by the Cabinet also stipulates that the director-general of the Forest Department will have to approve each Provincial committee's decision to declare a community forest. According to this draft, he also will have the authority to rescind designation as a community-forest area. The first draft prepared by the Forest Department at the beginning of the 1990s and the Wongsriwong draft had envisaged a more decentralized version, which did not require the approval of the Forest Department's director-general for the decision of the provincial-level committees to declare community forests. According to information from the Forest Department, the more centralized version was adopted due to concerns expressed by academics and by the leader of Chart Thai party (which is in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture) that the final responsibility for protecting the country's forests – as a public good of national concern - should remain at the national level. Academics and NGOs opposing the current Cabinet's draft claim that the centralized version reflects Forest Department's own concern to loose authority.²⁰

Making use of the law petition regulation which was introduced with Thailand's new Constitution in 1997 (Section 170), NGOs and POs which oppose the government's draft submitted their own draft, an updated version of the earlier People's Draft mentioned above,²¹ together with 50,000 signatures to the Parliament on the first of March 2000. This act was described in the press with headlines such as "Citizens draft historic new forest law" (The Nation, 3/1/00, p.1) and "Landmark public bill submitted" (Bangkok Post, 3/2/00, p.1).

It can be derived from this overview that the debate has not focused on the basic question of whether or not devolution in the forestry should happen at all. The objective to devolve authority in forest management in some form to local communities was already agreed upon in the government sector since the beginning of the 1990s, as is indicated by the drafting of a Community Forest Bill by the Forest Department. Moreover, Thailand's New Constitution clearly stipulates decentralization (Chapter IX) and demands explicitly the participation of local government in "the management, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and environment in the area of the locality" (Section 290). While the principle goal of devolution in the forestry sector was not contested, the debate focused on the extent to which devolution should actually occur and which governance structure should be established. The contested issues concern (1) the level (provincial versus national) at which final decisions on community forests are to be made, and (2) the participation of civil society in decision-making on community forests. While the People's draft attributes the authority to approve the villagers' request to designate a community forest to a committee at the provincial level which comprises members of government and civil society (see above),²² the Cabinet's draft attributes this authority to the head of the Forest Department at the national level. According to the available information, both drafts attribute, however, the final authority in disputed cases to a national-level committee comprising members of government and civil society, chaired by the Minister of Agriculture.

The divergent positions in the two drafts will not be evaluated here because the focus of

²⁰ See, for example, the article "Disputes over verification threaten community forests" in The Nation, 6/28/99, Section: Politics.

²¹ The brochure prepared for the collection of 50,000 signatures published by the Community Forestry Bill (by the People) Support Committee, 1999, explains that the draft has been adapted to the New Constitution.

²² See brochure by the Support Committee, 1999.

this paper is a positive analysis of policy formation, not a normative analysis of the “optimum level” of decentralization. The following section intends to identify which factors influence the political feasibility of a more decentralized version, represented by the People’s draft. The normative question of the “optimal level” of devolution in natural resource is unresolved from a theoretical point of view (Lutz & Caldecott 1996), and can probably not be resolved by scientists due to value judgments involved.

3.2 Social Capital

Local communities and their organizations

A remarkable feature of the local communities²³ in Northern Thailand is their comparatively high degree of organization related to natural resource management. In addition to traditional or customary institutions of natural resource management, which are especially prevalent among the different ethnic minorities living in the mountain areas of Northern Thailand, forest and watershed management groups or committees at the village level have increasingly been formed during the last decades. Watershed network organizations have also been created, which allow for co-operation between villages in the same micro-watershed. The formation of such organizations took place both without intervention from outside, and with the support of governmental and non-governmental organizations and development projects.²⁴ Interviews with representatives of watershed management groups and networks in 1999 provided evidence that the formation of these organizations and organizational networks was often promoted by the experience of an increasing shortage of irrigation water or by efforts to protect the village’s forest resources against claims by private investors or conservation purposes of the state. Several cases were reported where Watershed Network Organizations successfully resolved upstream-downstream conflicts between communities. The development of formalized (written) village regulations concerning forest and watershed management, including enforcement mechanisms such as payments to the village funds, and the use of three-dimensional watershed models play an important role in these organizations.

Politically oriented organizations, especially of ethnic minorities living in protected areas, have also been created on a regional basis, such as the Northern Farmers’ Network and the Northern Tribal People’s Network. Hill tribe people in over 100 villages located in protected areas in the North have joined the Assembly of the Poor, a nation-wide network which includes both rural and urban grassroots organizations. With a specific focus on the community forestry issue, the Northern Community Forest Assembly comprising more than 730 communities has been formed. Lowland farmers who claim that hill tribe settlements in critical watershed areas are responsible for water shortages and should be resettled have also formed an organization, the Chom Thong Forest Conservation Group.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

As indicated above, two groups of NGOs can be distinguished which differ in their position concerning the Community Forestry Bill. The NGOs promoting the People’s draft are to a large extent engaged in community-based rural development activities in the Northern Provinces and have played a supportive role for the emergence or strengthening of the community-based forest

²³ The term is used here in a general sense to refer to the village population. On the problems of this concept, see Agrawal & Gibson (1999).

²⁴ See Roongruangsee (1994) and Poffenberger & McGean (1993):

management institutions described above. They typically exercise advocacy for ethnic minorities living in protected areas. Prominent examples of this group of NGOs include the Northern Development Foundation, the Inter-Mountain People Education and Culture in Thailand, the NorthNet Foundation and the Hill Area Development Foundation. The position of these NGOs as promoters of the People's draft has to be seen in the broader perspective of the NGO movement in Thailand, to which they belong. Predominant orientations of the movement, as described by political observers,²⁵ include a close relation to rural grassroots organizations, advocacy of civil rights and minority rights, an explicitly critical position towards the state and the bureaucracy, promotion of decentralization and political reform, and a pronounced critique of commercialization and Western-style capitalist development.

The second group of NGOs, which opposes the People's draft version of the Community Forestry Bill is much smaller. These NGOs are often referred to as "deep green" in the public discourse. The group comprises around 25 NGOs, which have formed the Centre for Watershed Forest Conservation. Prominent members include the Seub Nakhasathien Foundation and the Dhammanaat Foundation. The latter has been engaged in watershed rehabilitation in Northern Thailand and, together with the Chong Thom Forest Conservation Group mentioned above, the Foundation demands that people living in critical watershed areas should be resettled.

In the **public perspective** (see Chapter 2), the comparatively high density of NGOs and POs in Thailand and their regional integration in umbrella organizations can be considered as an important stock of structural social capital. The traditional and modern institutions of forest and watershed management described above constitute a valuable stock of structural social capital, as well.

Turning to the **actors' perspective**, it is obvious that the major actors in community forestry policy formation - NGOs and POs - possess instrumental social capital in form of their own organization. They were able to build additional social capital by forming networks and building alliances with other organizations. The Northern Community Forestry Assembly comprising over 730 communities is an impressive example. As can be derived from above, the level of social capital held by the opponents of the People's draft in form of NGOs and POs is much lower. The Chom Thong Conservation Group appears to be indeed the only farmers' organization opposing the People's draft which had been formed in Northern Thailand. The network of the NGOs opposing the People's draft is also comparatively small. A leading member of the Dhammanaat Foundation stressed in an interview with the author that the opposition started with only three NGOs. Social capital in form of family relations and personal friendships was initially used to extend this network.

Following Bourdieu (see Chapter 2), membership in elites and alliances with elites represents another form of instrumental social capital. This type of social capital was held both by proponents and opponents of the People's draft. The supporters of the People's draft were able to build alliances with academics, who act as (free-of-charge) consultants and advisors for them. Academics also play an important role in the conservation-oriented NGOs which oppose the People's draft. One leading member of the Dhammanaat Foundation possesses social capital in form of belonging to the nobility. One can also consider the relationships with religious groups, which are found among supporters and opponents of the People's draft, as a form of social

²⁵ See, for example, Connors (1999).

capital.

Depending on the definition used, the scientific knowledge produced on community forestry and conservation issues may also be considered as social capital, which can be converted into political capital by using it to justify the actors position in the political discourse. (In Bourdieu's system, scientific knowledge would have to be considered as cultural capital).

According to the framework proposed in Chapter 2, the social capital held by other types of actors, such as the Forest Department and political parties, would have to be identified as well. For reasons of scope, this point is not explored here.

3.3 Transformations of Social into Political capital

Drawing on Chapter 2, the objective of this section is to identify the variables which are relevant for the transformation of social into political capital. Table 2 summarizes the variables derived from this case.

Electoral leverage

Actors such as NGOs and POs, which dispose of a high level of social capital in form of organizations and networks, can try to convert it into instrumental political capital in form of electoral leverage. The opportunities to build up this type of political capital are conditioned by the political party system and the electoral system (structural political capital). Thailand's party system²⁶ shows a considerable fluctuation: political parties frequently emerge and decline and, prior to elections, leading politicians and large numbers of their supporters change their parties. The political parties are not clearly differentiated by programs and ideological orientations, and business circles which finance the parties have a high influence on party politics. The term "money politics" is used to characterize this system.²⁷ Vote buying (the transformation of economic into political capital) has reached inflationary heights in the 1990s (Connors 1999). Thailand's party system emerged after World War II, with numerous interruptions by military governments, which have – in terms of the our framework - hindered the formation of structural political capital in form of a well-functioning party system. Pluralism among political parties has remained limited with no leftist party within the present system. There is also a strong element of regional representation in Thai party politics. With the exception of the Democrat Party, the parties do not draw their MPs from all regions of the country. Consequently, it is a major strategy of MPs, especially in rural areas, to address in their election campaigns what they perceive as the current most popular demands in their constituencies rather than referring to general party principles (Limmanee 1998: 416, 419).

The regional element in Thai politics probably promoted the involvement of political parties in the community forestry debate, because it is an important regional issue in the Northern and North-Eastern region. Three major political parties, the Democrat Party, the Chart Thai Party and the New Aspiration Party, which have a power base in the North and the Northeast, submitted their own draft of the Community Forestry Bill to the parliament. At present, the government is formed by a coalition led by the Democrat Party. The Chart Thai Party, a major coalition partner, is in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture and, therefore, of the Forest

²⁶ See Limmanee (1998) for an analysis of Thailand's party system. See also Connors (1999).

²⁷ As Connors (1999: 205) describes: "The buying of influence extended from the lowest level – the buying of a citizen's vote – to purchasing a support base in a political party to secure a Cabinet seat. Once there, the great expenditure would be recouped by any (and most illegitimate) means."

Department.²⁸ The New Aspiration Party is in the opposition. The following newspaper report on the strategy of the Northern Community Forestry Assembly shows that the supporters of the People's draft clearly try to transform their social capital held in form of organizational density into the political capital of electoral leverage:

“As part of the plan to push the new bill, the assembly said it will pressure political parties into announcing their stand before the next election. The group will only consider electing a party that supports the bill, the assembly leader said. (...) The Lamphun governor helped the assembly submit its stand to the prime minister last Friday, before submitting the request to leading party representatives from the Democrat Party and the New Aspiration Party (NAP). The NAP sent Lamphun MP Montri Darnphaiboon to meet the assembly at Lamphun City Hall, while the Democrat Party sent Chiang Mai MP Charinrat Phuthapuan's secretary, Naparat Charoenrat. Montri clearly supported the bill, saying the NAP submitted its draft bill to Parliament on Aug 11, 1997, and is waiting for the Democrat draft. The NAP version of the bill is similar to the assembly's request, he claimed. Although Naparat has no authority to make decisions about this important issue, she will pass all requests from villagers to her boss, and she guaranteed that the letters will be on Premier Chuan Leekpai's desk when he arrives in Chiang Mai on Monday“ (The Nation, 18/1/99, Section Politics – Local, “Northern villagers seek 50,000 signatures for forest bill” by K. Sukin).

In principle, the “perverse” structural political capital of vote buying in Thai politics can diminish the political capital of electoral leverage built by such efforts. However, an important event which recently changed the structural political capital in Thailand is the promulgation of the New Constitution mentioned above.²⁹ The practice of vote buying is expected to decrease under this Constitution. The Constitution also intends to strengthen the political party system by providing state funds to parties. This has recently led to plans within the NGO movement to establish a “Green Party” (using Germany's Green Party as a model, which also emerged from a grassroots-oriented NGO movement). Supporters of the plan reportedly mentioned the limited success concerning the Community Forestry Bill as one example for the need to establish a political party (The Nation, 3/26/00, p.1).

A more complete analysis of the role of electoral leverage would have to include the “median-voter” argument of pluralist theories. Empirical evidence on the position of the median voter concerning devolution in the forestry sector in Thailand could not be found. However, what can be seen in this context are the arguments by groups opposing the People's draft. They hold that draft would not be in the interest of the majority of the Thai population as it could guarantee the protection of the country's watersheds (see quotations below).

Direct participation in the legislative process

As mentioned above, the New Constitution has created the possibility of citizens' participation in the legislative process by proposing a law. The social capital of the supporters of the People's draft allowed them to make use of this possibility and collect more than 50,000 signatures, a process, which definitely requires a high degree of organization and logistical support. The fact that the Community Forestry Bill was the first bill proposed under this provision of the New Constitution is an indicator of the “political entrepreneurship” and the efficiency of the

²⁸ The following passage indicates the influence of the Chart Thai Party on the Forest Department. The passage is drawn from a report on the press conference given by the director-general of the Forest Department upon his appointment: “The new director general admitted that his transfer was backed by Chat Thai Party leader Banharn Silapa-archa. ‘I accept that he is the one who put me in this position. He gave me a lot of good advice which I agreed to follow,’ he said. (In The Nation, 4/8/98 Section: Politics, “RFD chief may stir a hornet's nest with move” by P. Hongthong.)

²⁹ See Connors (1999) for an analysis of the process.

supporters of the People's draft in transforming social into political capital.

Disruptive leverage

This term is used here to refer to public rallies organized in Northern Thailand both by supporters and opponents of a decentralized system of forest management. Hicks & Misra (1993) use the term disruptive leverage to refer to strikes by organized workers. In this case, it is the disruption of the economic system which links such actions to political decision-making. The social groups discussed here, organized farmers and NGOs, have less possibilities to cause interruptions in the economic system. The objective of their rallies is rather to enter directly into direct negotiations with the government. This way of getting access to political decision-makers is perhaps a substitute for conventional forms of lobbying, exercised by actors who do not have the social or economic capital needed to engage in lobbying.

In 1997, the Northern Farmers' Network under the Assembly of the Poor, representing more than 100 villages located in protected areas, staged a protest in front of the Government House, which lasted for several months.³⁰ The primary objective of the protest was to avoid the eviction of the villagers from the protected areas, but the Community Forestry Bill was also raised as a closely related issue. The rallies led to direct negotiations with Prime Minister Chavalit and resulted in three Cabinet resolutions, which allowed the villagers to stay in protected areas under certain conditions. One of the three Cabinet resolutions dealt not only with the protesting villagers, but intended to benefit villagers living in protected areas nation-wide. Conservation-oriented NGOs criticized that the resolution did not specify the criteria according to which villagers may be granted the right to stay. In 1998, the Chom Thong Conservation Group, claiming that ethnic minorities settling in upland areas were responsible for their water shortages, organized a rally involving thousands of lowland villagers against the Cabinet resolutions. The group also organized road blockades - affecting ethnic minorities living in upland areas - which lasted for several month. The new government under Prime Minister Chuan Leepkai finally replaced the three resolutions of the former Cabinet by a new one, which stipulated the resettlement of villagers living in "ecologically sensitive areas," irrespective of whether the villagers had settled there before the protection status was declared. The process leading to this new resolution was accompanied by public rallies of proponents and the opponents, targeted at the Minister of Agriculture. He finally submitted a version to the Cabinet which was less restrictive than that originally prepared by the Forest Department,³¹ but more restrictive than that demanded by the Assembly of the Poor. The version he submitted was obviously influenced both by disruptive and by electoral leverage. The Minister was quoted as saying that the resolution accepts "the philosophy of coexistence between humans and forest," but also conforms "to the demands of the majority who realised the importance of preserving the limited natural forest areas." (The Nation, 7/1/98, Section: Politics, "Cabinet okays key proposals on forest land" by P. Sivalo and P. Hongthong).

Negotiations between peak organizations

Direct negotiations between proponents and opponents of the Cabinet resolutions also played a

³⁰ This paragraph is based on interviews and various articles in The Nation and Bangkok Post which reported on these events.

³¹ See the following articles in The Nation, Section Politics: 4/22/98, "Pongpol wants RFD to re-study proposal" by P. Hongthong and 5/15/98 "Redefinition of forest areas worries poor" by P. Hongthong;

role, as the following report on the Center for Watershed Forest Conservation indicates:

“The proposal was the most recent result of several rounds of negotiations between the centre and the Northern Farmers Network (NFN). It was seen as a compromise between the two groups who hold opposing ideologies about man and forest.” (The Nation, 6/24/98, Section Politics: “Cabinet postpones decision on NFPC [National Forest Planning Committee] plan”)

The negotiations show that agreements between peak associations representing different interests – an analogy to the meso-corporatist argument between business and labor associations dealt with in Chapter 2 – also have to be considered as political capital influencing environmental policy formation. Concerning the Community Forestry Bill, however, a pact between the organizations promoting different versions could not be reached until today.

Lobbyism

According to an interview with the Vice President of the Dhammanaat Foundation, this NGO saw itself “forced” to enter the political arena by their concern about the ecological implications of the three Cabinet resolutions of 1997 and by provisions in the Community Forestry Bill which allows to establish community forests in protected areas.³² The Foundation first tried to build a network of conservation-oriented NGOs (see above) and, as a major strategy, engaged in lobbying of political and administrative decision-makers. It appears justified to assume that social capital held by this group in the form of belonging to elites (see above) may have been useful for building up political capital by lobbying. According to the interviewed Dhammanaat leader, the group was able to convince leading members of the Democrat Party of their position.

Strategic Use of Scientific Knowledge

In environmental politics, the role of scientific knowledge plays a particularly important role (Keeley & Scoones 1999). The strategic use of scientific knowledge in the political discourse is, therefore, considered as instrumental political capital. Both the proponents and the opponents of the People’s draft used this type of political capital. The alliance between academics and the grassroots-oriented NGO and PO movement is a distinctive feature of Thai politics, which has been described as a “third force.” The following quotation shows, how social capital held in form of alliances with academics was transformed into political capital and then influenced the formation of community forestry policy.

“Dr Anan Kanchanaphan of Chiang Mai University explains that academics have a role to play because Thais trust their status as *aajaan* (teachers), the kind of respect which NGO workers are not accorded. ‘Sometimes we haven’t said anything new or anything different from the activists and villagers. The problems tackled by the Assembly of the Poor, for example, did not receive much attention from the public until we came out to stress the very same points,’ he said. But like many academics, Anan has better reasons than this for his involvement in social movements. One is because he saw certain loopholes in the NGOs’ arguments, and the other is that he wants to influence policy-writing. An example, he said, is the drafting of the Community Forest Bill. The bill was the result of an extensive course of field research which he and his colleagues at Chiang Mai University designed so that NGOs and villagers living in the forests were included in the process. From that, the NGOs and

³² The Vice President of the Dhammanaat Foundation also expressed her views in an interview with the journal *Watershed*: “Q: When did Dhammanaat make the decision to begin to act at a national political level? A: We didn’t make any kind of decision, it was made for us, by the Community Forestry Bill proposing that community forests might be set up in these fragile areas. We have not been and never wanted to be involved in politics. The only reason we’re doing it is to ensure the survival of everyone in the nation. That’s our only reason. I really must emphasize that.” (Svasti 1998: 13).

villagers soon realised that the heart of the bill should be villagers' rights to manage the forest, not the right to own the forest, as formerly demanded by NGOs." (The Nation, 8/31/98, Section: Editorial & Opinion, "Academic-NGO alliance: the third force" by N. Tangwisutijit).

Actors opposing decentralization in forest management can, however, also refer to academics in support of their position, as indicated by the following report on an internal seminar held by the Forest Department to discuss its standpoint concerning the Community Forestry Bill:

"Dr. Uthid Kut-in, Kasetsart University faculty of forestry dean, (...), suggested the community forest be included in the Forest Reserve Act or the National Park Act rather than creating a Community Forest Bill, because the new bill would give more authority than the two current Acts. Decentralising forest management to community level will cause many practical problems, and monitoring will be impossible, because local communities lack academic support, he said. Dr Uthid said he did not recommend improving the bill and it would be unacceptable to resubmit it to the Cabinet." (The Nation, 1/13/99, Section Politics, "RFD chief proposes economic-forest policy" by K.Sukin).

The conservation-oriented NGOs base their position mostly on arguments drawn from natural sciences, especially hydrology and ecology. However, empirical evidence on the role of agriculture for watershed degradation based on long-term studies is rather limited for Northern Thailand. Even in the area of Doi Inthanon, where the most serious up-stream down-stream conflicts in Northern Thailand have occurred, no data exist which could show to which extent water shortages are caused by (1) deforestation in upland areas, or (2) increased water use for irrigation in lowland areas, or (3) natural processes.³³ Forsyth (1999) summarizes the results of three recent hydrological, pedological and ecological research projects in Northern Thailand which suggest that much of the so-called watershed degradation is actually the result of long-term naturally occurring bio-physical processes.

The use of scientific knowledge in the political discourse in Thailand is obviously characterized by the same features which have been observed elsewhere. As Leach & Mearns (1996), Hajer (1995) and others have shown, environmental discourses are often dominated by "environmental orthodoxies" concerning deforestation, land degradation, shifting cultivation, etc., which – on closer examination – are contradicted by site-specific empirical evidence. Such problems are, however, not confined to natural sciences. In anthropological studies, a focus on community features which are strategically useful in the political discourse –homogenous social structure and shared interests and norms – may distract attention from socio-economic differentiation, multiple interests and the role of local elites and micro-politics in local communities (Agrawal & Gibson 1999).

Politicizability and Use of Ideological Resources

Both the promoters and the opponents of a more decentralized forestry management could obviously make political capital of a high "politicizability" of the forestry issue in the Thailand. Forestry-related issues generally receive a high coverage in the press. As one article stated:

"Improving forestry management, along with the related issue of water management, is probably the biggest environmental issue facing Thailand today." (The Nation, 4/10/99, Section: Editorial & Opinion "Creating a buffer for forests" by James Jahn).

Both the supporters and the opponents of the People's draft were also able to link their standpoint in the community forestry debate to other issues of public concern. The supporters of a more decentralized forest policy associate the community forestry issue with minority and civil rights

³³ See The Nation, 6/9/98 Section: Editorial & Opinion "Battle for Inthanond affects all parties."

and with the related social and economic problems faced by ethnic minority groups. A considerable proportion of the ethnic minority population in Northern Thailand does not have Thai citizenship and is, therefore, marginalized. The opponents of the People's draft refer to the national concern for water. In view of frequent water shortages, the water question can be politicized both for the rural lowland Thai population who depends on irrigated agriculture, and for the urban population which has increasing water needs.

In terms of the analytical framework, drawing on issues which can easily be politicized such as minority rights or national concerns, may be considered as a strategy to build political capital by using "ideological resources."³⁴ This type of political capital is also used when proponents of the People's draft are accused of being "leftist" and described as "melons" (outside green, inside red), or when opponents are accused as being dominated by neo-colonial Western influence and described as "bananas" (outside yellow = Asian, inside white = Western).

International Influence and "Iso-morphic Pressure"

International organizations play a role by providing funds for community-forest related activities, both to the government and to the non-government sector. In view of their opposition against international financial institutions, many NGOs do not accept funds from the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank. They rely mostly on European donors, especially the Danish Environment and Development co-operation (DANCED), which preferably fund activities related to community-based natural resource management. The international influence appears to be limited to this indirect way of financing. Concerning the Community Forestry Bill, it could not be observed that international organizations or foreign-funded development projects appeared themselves as prominent actors in the political arena. This situation is different from other countries in the region, for example Vietnam, where international organizations and bilateral development projects in the forestry sector played an important role in establishing a policy-oriented National Working Group on Community Forestry. The possibilities to derive political capital from international agreements, for example the Agenda 21 or the Convention on Biological Diversity, appear also comparatively limited in Thailand.³⁵ One can hypothesize that the "iso-morphic pressure" (see Chapter 2) of globalization on national policy formation in the environmental sector is more moderate in Thailand than in other countries of the region.

Discretionary Administrative Authority

Discretionary administrative authority³⁶ refers in this context to the possibilities of the bureaucracy to influence policy formation. These possibilities are conditioned by legislative procedures, as the following quotation indicates:

"If approved by the Cabinet, the RFD's [Royal Forest Department's] draft is expected to be the core draft deliberated by the Parliament. The others will be considered if and when amendments are made to the core draft." (The Nation, 6/28/99, Section: Politics, "Disputes over verification threaten community forests" by K. Sukin).

³⁴ Note that the term "ideology" is used in an analytical, not a pejorative sense here.

³⁵ Both the proponents and the opponents of the People's draft could find passages in these international agreements to support their position. However, international agreements are seen with caution by Thailand's NGO movement. There debate of whether or not Thailand should ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity lasted for several years.

³⁶ Hicks & Misra (1993) use the term "sub-governmental administrative authority."

The influence resulting from role of the Forest Department in the legislative procedure represents structural political capital, which can lead to the formation of instrumental political capital in several ways. NGOs and POs can build alliances with the Forest Department and convert this social into political capital by pursuing their objectives via the Forest Department's influence on policy formation. The conservation-oriented NGOs obviously used this type of political capital. The organizations supporting of the People's draft chose a different strategy³⁷ and became increasingly involved in confrontations with the Forest Department at the end of the 1990s.

In order to avoid the shortcomings of pluralist approaches, it is important to consider the Forest Department as an actor itself, not only as a "transmission mechanism" mediating the influence of different interest groups on policy formation. It is, however, beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the Forest Department in its role as actor in detail. This would require to disaggregate the Department and consider different interests and orientations (mission orientation versus self-interest, etc.) held by officials of different branches and at different levels. For reasons of scope, we consider here only the role of the Forest Department's director-general. The current director-general, Plodprasop Suraswadi, was appointed in August 1998, replacing a predecessor who was moved after a major illegal logging scandal.. The appointment is a political decision, which needs Cabinet approval and backing by the party in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture. On the occasion of his appointment, the director general held a press conference to deliver his vision as the new leader of the agency, where he also addressed the Community Forestry Bill:

"Plodprasop said he will change the image of RFD [Royal Forest Department] to one of protector of the forests. (...) Plodprasop announced his stance on the controversial human and forest issue, saying that he supports the move of National Forestry Policy Committee (NFPC) to evict villagers who stayed in the ecologically sensitive area. Plodprasop said he will support the controversial Community Forest Bill only if its philosophy is changed. He disagrees that communities should be allowed to live in the conservation area." (The Nation 4/8/98, Section: Politics, "RFD chief may stir a hornet's nest with move" by P. Hongthong).

In a seminar of the Forest Department in January 1999, the director-general also announced that commercial forest plantations should be allowed in community forests.³⁸ The supporters of the People's draft disagree with these issues, which led to increasing confrontation with the Forest Department, as the following report indicates:

"After their two-day annual seminar last week, about 733 communities, under the umbrella of the Northern Community Forest Assembly, said they will be no longer discuss the bill with opposition groups, led by the Royal Forestry Department (RFD). Jaran Khasak, leader of the assembly, said they have been having discussions with their opponents for more than a year, both formally and informally. 'We already know where each other stands. A decision is required from the government about support for the Community Forest Bill,' he said." (The Nation, 18/1/99, Section Politics – Local, "Northern villagers seek 50,000 signatures for forest bill" by K. Sukin)..

As the legislative process in Parliament had not taken place at the time of writing this paper, an analysis of how the political capital accumulated by the proponents of a more decentralized forest policy on the one hand, and the political capital of their opponents on the other hand, will

³⁷ Interviewed members of organizations supporting the People's draft expressed little hope that efforts to influence the Forest Department would be an appropriate means to achieve their objectives.

³⁸ According to the plans of the Forest Department, the income of such commercial forests should accrue to the entire community, not to individuals. (The Nation, 1/13/99, Section Politics, "RFD chief proposes economic-forest policy" by K. Sukin).

eventually determine the outcome of the legislative process. A preliminary assessment of the process so far suggests that a “window” for a more decentralized system of forestry management was opened in the early 1990s. The legislative process was, however, retarded, among other reasons due to frequent change of governments. At the end of the 1990s, it had become increasingly difficult to establish the decentralized option. The NGO movement had become divided over this issue, and actors had accumulated political capital who stress the value of natural resources as a public good - to be protected by the nation-state. It remains to be seen whether this can be outweighed by the political capital of those promoting a more decentralized version, which places with regard to resource conservation more trust in civil society and local communities than in the nation-state and the public administration.

Table 2 summarizes the variables of political and social capital which have been derived from the Thai case study.

Table 2: Social and Political Capital relevant for Natural Resource Policy Formation

	Structural Capital (Public Perspective)	Instrumental Capital (Actor’s Perspective)
Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * NGOs and POs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - density, diversity - co-ordination, integration * Traditional and modern institutions and knowledge, especially concerning natural resource management * Elites (academics, nobility, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Membership in and alliances with NGOs/POs * Creation of specific NGOs / POs * Membership in and alliance with elites * Strengthening of traditional and modern institutions for natural resource management (* Production of scientific knowledge)
Political Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Political party system/electoral system * Freedom of press * Influence of lobbyism * Possibilities to politicize forestry or watershed issues nationwide * Political relevance of regional/rural problems in national politics * Participatory elements in political decision-making * International influence on national politics (“isomorphic pressure”) * Discretionary administrative authority * <i>Perverse political capital</i> (e.g., “money politics”, vote buying) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Lobbying of political and administrative decision makers * Electoral leverage * Disruptive leverage (organization of rallies) * Access to press / influence on public political discourse <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of scientific knowledge in discourse - use of ideological resources in discourse * International resources which can be used in national political process (financial resources, international conventions, etc.)

Source: own representation

4 The Case of Rural Laborers in Colombia’s Oil Industry

The Columbian case has been selected to illustrate the application of the political capital framework in a micro-political context. The case deals with the relations between rural laborers

and the oil industry in Casanare, Colombia.³⁹ This implies that the focus here is not placed on state policies, but on the policies of a multi-national company concerning their relation to the local population. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the case. The second section applies the political capital framework to identify which types of political capital and which capital transformations were relevant in this context.

4.1 The Oil Boom in Casanare

Casanare is located in the *llanos orientales* of Colombia, a sparsely populated region east of the Andes, where substantial oil reserves have been discovered. The area's infra-structural development lags far behind the rest of the country. Before the arrival of the oil industry in the 1980s, the major income sources were extensive livestock raising and some semi-intensified rice or oil palm production. The population consists mainly of resource-poor small farmers, who hire out their labor to larger farms to complement their income.

The population is organized in so called *juntas de accion communal*, community organizations, which are formed for the management of communal infra-structure, especially schools, and for pursuing common interests, such as soliciting infra-structural development from the municipal and regional governments. As grazing lands have been enclosed since the 1960s, common property and collective action in natural resource management does not play a significant role in the region. The emergence of other lasting social networks besides the semi-formal *juntas the accion communal* is hampered by high immigration and fluctuation of the population, which has been accelerated by the oil boom (Wittmer 1999).

The oil exploitation in Casanare is conducted by a consortium of oil companies, which sub-contract a considerable proportion of their activities to national and international firms. Infra-structural development, such as the construction of feeder roads and bridges, is in many sites a prerequisite to the exploitation of oil. In the initial phase, this has resulted in a sharply raising demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labor. The oil industry employed whoever was available, paying higher wages than was usual for comparable work in agriculture or in infra-structure projects of the government. As the oil industry grew, the companies started to pay the same fringe benefits and social security services, which are usual in the oil industry in other regions of Columbia. These benefits, which are above those required by law, are paid even though the organization of workers in unions remained low in Casanare, as compared to other regions, and confrontations between organized workers and the oil enterprises did not come to play a role. For reasons discussed below in more detail, the workers in Casanare obviously did not have to rely on the political capital of "disruptive leverage," which was used by organized workers in other regions to influence the oil companies' labor policies.

The rural population in Casanare was also able to influence the policy of the oil companies concerning the distribution of labor contracts. As the fluctuating labor demand of oil drilling requires flexible labor arrangements, short-term contracts are usual in this branch. As the initial costs of hiring laborers for training, entrance health examination, working gear, etc., are high, the companies have an interest to re-employ the same workers for new contracts. This interest is not compatible with the claim of the local population to distribute employment

³⁹ The empirical information on this case has been collected in connection with a research project on the reaction of small-scale farmers to the rapid economic change caused by the oil boom in Casanare (Wittmer 1999). Research methods included interviews with small-scale farmers, representatives of the oil industry, local government and other stake holders, such as human resource contractors of the oil industry.

opportunities among all community members. Community representatives frequently and clearly addressed this demand to the oil industry (Wittmer 1999). Considering the comparatively low level of organization among the local population, as outlined above, the question arises why such a position of solidarity emerged. Two factors appear relevant: First, there was no privileged group in the community which had the means (exclusionary social capital) to secure for themselves preferential access to labor contracts. Therefore, supporting the claim to rotate working opportunities increased the chances of individual community members to gain access to labor contracts. Second, the local population had an interest to exclude outsiders from receiving labor contracts. Migrant workers are usually preferred by the oil industry because they are often better qualified due to earlier experience and they are extremely mobile and flexible. The local population, however, claimed a right to work with the oil industry based on the fact of belonging to the local population.

Interestingly, the oil industry in Casanare has made considerable efforts to comply with the demands of the local population. Even though a rotation of workers implies higher transaction costs for the company, the principle of rotation is largely followed. Sub-contractors are also advised to employ a certain percentage of local workers. The organizational procedure to assure employment opportunities for all community members in the job distribution process involve the above mentioned *juntas de accion communal*, which register interested workers. Earlier, these lists have been passed on directly to the companies. After accusations that a fair distribution of contracts among community members was not achieved and a high participation of locals compared to migrant workers was not ensured, the oil industry started to finance special centers in the main oil producing municipalities, which act as “brokers” in the labor market. The centers receive lists of people willing to work from the different community organizations and statements of the demand for workers by the different companies. Applying a rotational system, the centers then assign workers to the companies in such a way that the employment opportunities are, as far as possible, spread equally within and between local communities and immigrant workers.

Another field in which the oil industry attempts to comply with local demands is the compensation for property damages caused by oil extraction. Compensations are paid even though the local population has hardly sufficient possibilities to use the court system to enforce any claims to compensation. Cases filed in court usually take years so that it would probably be less expensive for the oil industry to wait for court decisions than to pay beforehand.

In summary, the policies of the oil industry in Casanare concerning their relations to the local population differ remarkably from the repressive practices observed in other countries, for example Nigeria (see Omoweh 1995). The policies also differ from cases such as Mexico (see Velásquez 1982), where small farmers faced major difficulties in ensuring compensation for property damages, even though they organized political action. The following section offers an explanation based on the political capital framework.

4.2 Social and Political Capital in the Casanare Case

Table 3 summarizes the variables of social and political capital which are relevant for the Casanare case. In the public perspective, the existing community organizations (*juntas de accion communal*) represent a stock of structural social capital. This stock may be judged as comparatively small, because other forms of social organization were less developed (see above). In the actors’ perspective, membership in community organizations represents instrumental

social capital, which could be converted into political capital to pursue community interests vis-à-vis the oil industry.

The crucial question in this case is, which type of political capital can effectively influence the oil companies' policies. The possibilities to exercise influence via politicians appear limited because in a marginal and still comparatively sparsely populated region, the possibilities to use political capital in form of electoral leverage are limited. The most important feature of the political system is in this case obviously the presence of guerrilla groups. Rubio (1997) interprets the guerilla, along with the Mafia and other institutions which reward rent-seeking and criminal activities as "perverse social capital." In terms of our framework, the guerilla is, however, to be considered as political capital as guerrilla groups have originally been formed to influence political decision-making. In this sense, the guerilla represent a "perverse" version of structural political capital which is otherwise formed, for example, by political parties. However, to the extent that the guerilla has become involved in mafia-like activities such as kidnapping and blackmailing which do not intend to influence political decision-making, the guerilla can also be considered as "perverse" social capital.

In the perspective of the small farmers and rural laborers, the presence of guerrilla groups produced a special form of instrumental social capital for them. Although the majority does not maintain direct relations with guerrilla, small farmers and rural laborers constitute the group that the guerilla alleges to represent and protect. This leads to a form of exclusionary social capital - in Bourdieu's sense - for the small farmers and rural laborers. The effectiveness with which this type of instrumental social capital could be converted into political capital was influenced by several structural variables of the political system. The oil industry, with its expensive installations extending over large areas (oil pipelines), is highly vulnerable to violent attacks. The oil industry can use two strategies to avoid such attacks: One is reliance on a strong state, or on a repressive political regime, as in Nigeria, which can protect the oil industry. The presence of the guerilla in Columbia actually indicates the absence of a strong state, which could protect the oil industry. Another potential strategy of the oil industry is to rely on "self-help" and employ paramilitary groups to protect oil installations. However, this possibility is constrained by increasing criticism and monitoring of oil companies by the press and civil society, both at the national and international level. The oil companies in Columbia have been accused of contracting paramilitary protection in the Colombian national press (e.g., *El Tiempo* 1997), the international press - *The Economist* (1997) titled "BP at War" - and the national press of other countries (e.g., *TAZ* 1998). Paramilitary groups are known for their human rights violations and the oil companies in Columbia have rejected the allegations. The public debate obviously limits the options of privately protecting oil installations. In addition, due to the large distances covered by pipelines, the costs of protection would also be high. Interviews with representatives of the oil industry by Moser (1998) indicated that, against this background, the companies consider it as more effective to invest in keeping the local population content with their policies.

Table 3: Social and political capital relevant for oil industry’s policies

	Structural Capital	Instrumental Capital
Social Capital	* Community organizations for communal resource management	* Membership in community organization which allows to voice community interests
Political Capital	* Low political relevance of issues affecting marginal regions * Absence of strong state that can protect oil installations * Interest of national / international press in reporting on oil companies <i>“Perverse political capital”</i> * Existence of guerilla	* Belonging to the group protected by guerilla * Criticism of multi-nationals companies in public discourse (“ideological resource”)

Source: own representation

5 Conclusions

The intention of this paper was to explore the usefulness of extending an analytical framework based on different forms of capital by introducing the concept of political capital in order to analyze processes of policy formation in rural development and natural resource management. More specifically, the focus was placed on an increased understanding of how local communities can gain influence in political processes, both at the regional and at the national level. Drawing on the work of political resource theorists, the proposed framework allows to integrate arguments which have been promoted by different schools of thought in political economy and political sciences, especially pluralist, statist and political conflict theories. The framework also allows to accommodate the role of knowledge, ideology and discourse, the relevance of which has been stressed in recent work on political processes concerning environmental policies.⁴⁰ Considering social and political capital both from the private and the public perspective, and taking “perverse” forms of social and political capital into account (which may persist in one or the other form in all types of political and social systems), the framework is widely applicable and not confined to any ideal model of a pluralist democracy. The case studies used for illustration have helped to specify the types of instrumental and structural social and political capital which are relevant for future comparative analyses. The paper has focused on the transformation of social capital into political capital, assuming that in the policy areas considered in this paper, other transformations, especially the transformation of economic into political capital, play a less important role than, for example, in economic policy formation. A number of potentials of the political capital concepts could only be mentioned, but not explored in this paper, especially the application of economic tools used in investment theory and New Institutional Economics. We hope that a further refinement and application of the political capital concept will help better understand how policies can be pursued which contribute to the goal referred to in the title of this Conference: Crafting Sustainable Commons in the New Millennium.

⁴⁰ See the review by Keeley & Scoones (1999).

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