

COMMONS FORUM *RESPONSE*

Response to: Exploring New Approaches to Community Governance, by David Brunckhorst

Meeting the challenge of incongruent scales – the role of government?

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David Brunckhorst commentary addresses the crucial problem of building integrative and adaptive resource governance, within and across landscapes and regions. It is easy to agree with the need of developing such holistic landscape analysis to connect local or regional experiences with global challenges, especially in the context of broader landscape scales. This is however, as Brunckhorst denotes, not without complications.

One such complication is related to what has been defined as incongruence between scales. In many policy areas, such as example biodiversity conservation, the policy development and the management process is separated between different levels; the international level where the environmental standards are set and the local or regional level where the standards are to be implemented, with few existing connections between the levels. The international standards and agreements are mainly focused on for example the function of ecosystems and conservational needs rather than on local communities and socio-economic concerns. Although the objectives of the standards may be in the long-term interest of the local community it may not address those immediate local concerns that those who are dependent on the resource must handle in their daily lives. The obvious risk with this situation, where the local level only serves as an implementing body, with limited possibilities to influence the environmental policies, is that the legitimacy of the management system will be undermined which in turn will affect the possibilities to achieve sustainable landscape development. Large carnivore policy and management in the Scandinavian countries is a representative example of incongruent scales. At the moment carnivore populations successively are rebounding and recolonising areas they have been absent from since the 1800's. Due to the lack of formal discretionary power at the regional level, poaching has become a severe threat to the survival of, in particular, the wolf population.

To be able to meet the challenges of incongruent scales it is necessary to move from problem-solving in simple systems to problem solving in complex systems. Multilevel and cross-scale institutional reforms enhancing vertical and horizontal integration are thus needed. Institutional analysis, considering what Elinor Ostrom defines as nested systems i.e. how the regional or local landscape is related to the framing institutions that impacts and put demands on policy development and management may be a useful tool to deal with such complex systems. However while scaling up the analysis a level, from the local level to a regional landscape level; it is also essential to consider other types of actors. The government, which often has played a minor role

in the study of the commons, has a key role to play in developing the capacity to deal with multiple objectives at a landscape level.

Vertical integration may be enhanced by the government serving as an intermediate link between the local, regional and the international level to balance different interests, reconciling local and global agendas. Experience from multi-level governance studies of for example the European Union or other federal structures may be of interest here.

The absence of horizontal integration between different governing structures and related interests tend to generate conflicts, and reduce policy creativity, adaptive and innovative capacity. Crucial to improve horizontal integration is thus coordination. Interesting initiatives, offering new modes of governance, linking different sectors, private and public actors including industry and different levels of government, into frameworks for effective horizontal coordination on a landscape level are Biosphere reserves and Model forests. With more than 500 Biosphere Reserves and about 50 Model Forest, and a number of Model Forest candidates throughout the world, these initiatives may play a significant role as working examples of sustainable management of natural resources where local and national actors see the need to address sustainability issues and create an innovative platform for sustainable landscape development. Since the boards of these initiatives often include a variety of governmental official from different levels, which can advance the ideas and interests of their own organisation, they may produce a certain amount of coordination without formal interventions.

To meet the challenges of incongruent scales, I agree with professor Brunckhorst that there is an urgent need for better communication between users and producers of knowledge to ensure a holistic understanding and that that results of our studies are communicated to the surrounding society. Transdisciplinary knowledge production, that is located in the interface of research and management, with close collaboration between different types of actors, offers such a process, also enabling vertical and horizontal integration.

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