Community governance of boreal forests: some lessons from the Swedish forest commons

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Swedish Forest Commons

- Established 1861-1918
- 33 separate FC
- 540 000 hectare productive forest land
- Privately owned - jointly managed
- 25 000 shareholders - 25% non-resident
How are Swedish FCs different from other commons?

- Swedish FCs do not have residency rules regarding membership
- Membership not limited to households/property (i.e., single property can have multiple shareholding)

Generally, eligible users had to be local residents who would be available to perform their full duties to contribute to the commons; absentees/landowners were not welcome. This requirement minimized enforcement costs since eligible local users and outsiders could be instantly distinguished. In Japan, a household that emigrated to the city would usually lose its rights to the commons, even if it retained private holdings in the village; for this reason a household might allow extraneous members to emigrate but would leave someone behind in the village to retain and exercise full participatory rights in the village. In Japan and elsewhere, the unit of accounting was

(McKean 1986)
How are Swedish FCs different from other commons?

The criteria for membership in the group of eligible users of the resource must also be clear. The user group has to share solid internal agreement over who its members are, and it is probably best if eligibility criteria for membership in this group do not allow the number of eligible users to expand rapidly. Many Swiss villages limit eligibility to persons who live in the village and purchase shares in the alp, so that new residents must find shares to buy, and shareowners who leave the village find it in their interest to sell their shares because they are unable to exercise their village rights from elsewhere. Thus, the size of the eligible user group remains stable over time. Japanese villages would usually confer eligibility and shares of harvest on households rather than individuals, and were also likely to limit membership to long-established "main" households rather than "branch" households. These practices assured that no special advantages went to large households, those that split, or new arrivals. Not only did this rule limit the number of eligible users and the burden on the commons but it also discouraged population growth. Communities elsewhere may be less strict—at their peril—about defining eligibility for membership in the user group. Vondal describes an Indonesian village whose communal resources

(McKean 1996)
Swedish Forest Commons: Why established?

Aims

- Improve forest management
- Provide sustainable economies locally
- Provide a solid basis for taxation
- Secure continued existence of independent class of farmers
- Support rural development and well-being
Swedish Forest Commons: Why established?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>To be achieved by</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improve forest management</td>
<td>Scientifically based forest management and planning</td>
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<td>Provide sustainable economies locally</td>
<td>Being a model for farmers’ own forest management</td>
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<td>Provide a solid basis for taxation</td>
<td>Providing employment</td>
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<td>Secure continued existence of independent class of farmers</td>
<td>Preventing forest companies from acquiring farmers’ forest land</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support rural development and well-being</td>
<td>Supporting local agriculture, forestry and common goods</td>
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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Department of Forest Resource Management
Survey of local resident members in 3 forest commons

survey of all members in a 4th forest common

Compare survey results between forest commons

Introduce methods to revitalize forest commons using pGIS
SFC Survey Results

- Low participation (30%) in general assembly even among resident shareholders
- Over 60% recognized the benefits linked to fishing, hunting, outdoor recreation
- 24% - 73% Sees no disadvantages
- 75% - 94% are pleased to be shareholders
In the Swedish Forest Commons...

- Differences satisfaction between forest commons regarding fulfilment of the “aims at establishment”
- Differences in levels of personal and communal benefits provided to their shareholders
- Not all the FCs are successful in terms of governance/management and generating revenues
In the Swedish Forest Commons...

- Low participating in regular meetings of the forest commons, and in decision-making

- Participation of female shareholders significantly lower – both in governance/management and in benefits sharing from the commons
Studies of commons elsewhere suggest that: long-enduring commons require an active participation of their members for their successful and long term existence.
More in depth survey

- Elucidate factors contributing to declining participation in the commons

- Identify factors that could generate interests among shareholders for more active participation in the commons

- Use the case of Vilhelmina Upper Forest Common to test the applicability of participatory-GIS as a tool for land use planning and communication
Vilhelmina Upper Forest Commons

- 56,500 ha in area; 40,000 ha productive forest land
- 393 properties associated with the commons (2009)
  - 165 single owned
  - 92 two owners
  - 136 three or more owners
- 906 registered shareholders (2009)
- 56.6% total non-resident shareholders
- 60% male shareholders, 38.2% female
- Generally less than 50 participants in general assembly
- No female representation in the board
Revitalizing engagement in FC by introducing a Forest Common-GIS

- More knowledge and understanding about the land would increase level of participation....
Swedish Forest Commons: Challenges

- Increasing proportion of remote shareholders
- Shareholders with decreasing forest dependency
- Decreasing relevance of many of the ‘establishment aims’
- Lack of shareholder participation in governance and in decision-making
  - Resistance to technology
  - pGIS introduced too recently to fully evaluate the impact
  - VUFC board’s willingness to interact and their interest in pGIS encouraging
Thank You!

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Latest publication on Swedish FC:
