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Challenges in incorporating the social dimension in a transnational sustainability project. The case of the FSC.¹

Magnus Boström

Magnus Boström
School of Life Sciences, Södertörn University College
SE-141 89 Huddinge
Sweden
magnus.bostrom@sh.se

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Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has encouraged the development of a variety of environmental reforms worldwide during the last couple of decades. The concept is usually divided into three pillars - economic, environmental, and social – and they are generally assumed to be compatible and mutually strengthening. In research, however, little attention has so far been paid to the linkages and integration of these dimensions, and in particular on the social dimension (Lehtonen 2004, Littig & Grießler 2005). While many policy-makers make commitments to sustainable development, few recognize the importance of placing this within the context of ‘social justice, equity and human rights’ (Agyeman & Evans, 2004:163).

From this background, I find it an intriguing question to look deeper into the issue regarding what benefits and difficulties that appear when actors try to incorporate social dimensions in sustainability projects. In this paper, I will elaborate on this topic by referring to a case study on how the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has tried to incorporate social sustainability goals, principles, and criteria. The FSC is a multi-stakeholder organization that sets standards and policies for sustainable forestry, on the transnational, national, and regional level. The FSC is chosen as a crucial case. Several scholars have portrayed the FSC as exemplary in its multi-stakeholder ambitions and far-reaching attempt to combine and balance environmental, social and economic objectives and aspects (e.g. Domask 2003; Pattberg 2007; Gulbrandsen, 2008). Despite these grand ambitions, critical challenges are observed in the practising of social sustainability (cf. Meidinger et al. 2004). In this paper, I will elaborate on some of these challenges, and I will argue that such may be found more generally in transnational and local sustainability projects.

Most studies on the FSC focus on one or several countries in which the FSC operates. But in this paper, I discuss the FSC at the transnational level. This focus does not exclude local experiences. Rather, experiences from how the FSC works on the local/national level may have something important to tell about the conditions for such a transnational standard-setting organization as the FSC. In the next section, I refer to literature that provides useful perspectives on the topic of social sustainability, and I very briefly introduce the framing, organizational, and power perspective that guides the subsequent analysis. Thereafter, I investigate, based on the perception of informants involved in the FSC, what aspects that have been easy or difficult to take into account in the standards and certified practice. In the

following section, I investigate the capacities among actors representing ‘social stakeholders’ to take part in the FSC organizational arrangement to make an impact in the standards and policies set. A key argument, throughout this paper is that difficulties in achieving a particular dimension of social sustainability – namely the inclusion and effective *participation* of stakeholders representing ‘social sustainability’ – in turn affect the opportunities to actually consider substantive aspects of social sustainability in the standards and certification.

The paper is based on 26 interviews (most of them by telephone), various documents (such as the FSC Social Strategy), and a participant observation during the FSC General Assembly 2008. The interviews were conducted between the spring of 2006 and the autumn of 2008. The research team selected informants from each of the three chambers within the FSC (social, environmental, and economic), from different parts of the world, from the FSC Secretariat, as well as a few non-members that in some way had a relation to the FSC.

How to incorporate the social dimension?

Despite the increasing attention towards social sustainability, little research on this dimension has been done so far. Previous research indicates that when actors attempt to achieve sustainability, conflicts may very well arise between the dimensions (e.g. Dobson 1999, Lehtonen 2004, Littig & Grießler 2005), or discourses on ‘environmental sustainability’ may neglect such aspects as social justice (Agyeman & Evans 2004). Some argue it is often the social dimensions – including both welfare aspects such as fair distribution of ‘environmental bads and goods’ and political aspects such as empowerment of weak societal groups and democratic political processes – that have been most difficult to realize in practice (ibid., Elliot 2005). It is often only the positive integration of environmental and economic aspects that are considered, and that has stimulated reform, as the ecological modernisation theory emphasise (e.g. Mol 1997), whereas aspects of social sustainability have been seen to fall within the traditional scope and control of the welfare state with no link to environmental protection.

Some scholars argue that the concept of *social* sustainability has been particularly difficult to analyse, comprehend and define compared to the other dimensions (e.g. Lehtonen 2004; Littig and Grießler 2005), and there is little agreement what it contains (Dillard et al. 2008). As the concept of Sustainable Development has its origin in environmental sustainability, social

issues have been seen to be of secondary importance (Bebbington & Dillard 2009). There is furthermore an unclear scientific basis from which social sustainability can be measured:

social sustainability appears to present different and more severe challenges in specification, understanding, and communication than environmental sustainability because there is no widely accepted scientific basis for analysis, unlike the ability to debate population ecology, acceptable levels of toxicity, or acceptable concentrations of green house gases in the atmosphere. Nor is there a common unit of measure such as monetary units with the economic dimension of sustainability (Bebbington & Dillard 2009:158).

In its very broadest meaning, the ‘social’ has to do with the entire relationship between society and nature; and which thereby include economic, cultural, political, and institutional structures and processes. Notions of social sustainability often refer to such aspects as social welfare, quality of life, social justice, social cohesion, cultural diversity, democratic rights, gender issues, workers’ rights, broad participation, development of social capital and individual capabilities and the like. It seems to be difficult, accordingly, to delimit and define what social sustainability is. Yet, several work implicates both a dimension focusing on *procedures*, such as the role of democratic representation, participation and deliberation, and one on the *substantive* matters that the standards or policies aim to improve (e.g. Agyeman and Evans 2004; Elliot 2005). In this paper, I refer to both these dimensions, and am also interested in the relation between them.

It is furthermore necessary to take into account how actors themselves frame social sustainability, as well as how they try to set up organizational arrangements and stakeholder categories that are assumed to represent social sustainability concerns. In doing this, I use an organizational and framing perspective, and draw attention to the way issues are defined, categorised, interpreted, included, excluded and so on. Organizing and framing is done in order to make a complex reality conceivable and understood (see e.g. Fischer, 2003; Boström & Klintman 2008). In order to analyze the strength of those who are supposed to represent social sustainability it is useful to add a power resource perspective. Power is a relational concept. It is not a thing someone has independently of social relations (Clegg et al. 2005), but being in possessions of ‘things’ may be a way to utilize power. Power in terms of socioeconomic resources, ability to control an agenda or capacity to shape debates and discourses are important aspects of participation in standard-setting. A power perspective could include formal positions, capacity to act, capacity to form alliances, framing skills as

well as what happens ‘backstage’, behind the (rhetorical) scene. All kinds of organizations mobilize, accumulate, control, and make use of collective resources, which they can use – or threaten to use – in order to exercise power (Ahrne 1994). In this paper, I will refer to material, symbolic, cognitive and social power resources (see also Tamm Hallström & Boström, forthcoming).

Defining and practising social sustainability in FSC: Achievement and challenges

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was formally established in 1993 with an aim to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world’s forests, through a system of certification and labelling. The basic FSC standards are known as the FSC ‘Principles and Criteria’, which are formulated at a general, abstract level and must be adjusted and concretized in regional or national processes of standard setting and certification (see <http://www.fsc.org/pc.html>). Certification is done by an accredited third party certifier which can use either a national/regional adjusted FSC-standard or FSC’s Principle & Criteria directly.

FSC was set up as a membership organization, having both individuals and organizations as members. It is governed by a General Assembly of members divided into three chambers (the environmental, the economic, and the social), each with one third of the voting power. In addition, the voting power is divided equally between developed (Northern) and developing (Southern) country members in each of the three chambers.

Which standards and policies are seen to reflect social sustainability objectives and aspects? The FSC has defined principles and criteria for a broad array of aspects such as indigenous peoples’ rights, local communities and workers’ rights. There are some possible aspects that are less frequently mentioned, such as gender issues, but, in all, few potential sustainability aspects are defined as irrelevant from the outset. It is however interesting to learn more what aspects (substance) have been easier or more difficult to take into account in practice. Here I will look more closely on this topic, based on the views of the informants. In general, I emphasise such aspects that several informants, which have no direct relation to each other, have mentioned. I discuss five issues.

A first issue concerns which social aspects of the FSC framework that informants consider satisfactorily addressed, or the opposite, in the standards as well as in the actual certification.

Several informants mention that the FSC principles and criteria have been a strikingly effective means for improving labour conditions in some countries. Such benefits include providing protective clothes and safety equipment (e.g. helmets, safe chainsaws) to workers. In addition, companies have been required to establish positions of specialists of environmental health and safety. Russian informants have mentioned such benefits as paying wages on time, and informants from developing countries have mentioned hiring workers only with contracts. There is a striking difference between the developed and developing world in these respects. In the developed world most of such topics are already well covered by existing legislation and administration, whereas the FSC standards can enable significant improvements in the developing world.

Several informants mention that the FSC framework is effective in developing countries also in the sense that it requires companies to comply with already existing rules, such as ILO-standards and national legislation. Interestingly, the national legislation is often seen as fairly good, but companies do not comply with them, and there is scarcity of state administrative resources for monitoring and sanctioning companies as well as problem with corruption. The FSC then plays an important role in that it requires compliance with national legislation. Informants also tell it is easier to address complaints through the FSC system, via auditors, than through the national legislation.

However, several informants mention there is too little focus on non-labour issues. Whereas they are in general fairly happy with substance criteria regarding the labour standards; they less happy with all other social aspects (concerning indigenous people, local communities) both regarding the standards set and how to interpret the standards in certification process.

A second issue, which several informants address, is that environmental aspects generally take precedence over social aspects, in both standard setting work and in certification. Most informants, including those representing environmental NGOs, state that social sustainability issues lags behind environmental aspects. One informant mentions that social values in the forest is usually seen as more fuzzy than environmental issues, which are seen as 'more scientific' and therefore less subjective and more legitimate to consider. In line with this, Bebbington and Dillard (2009) argue that the social dimension of Sustainable Development is more difficult to take into account in corporate public reporting and accounting than both the Environmental and Economic dimension, because 'the elements that make up the social

dimension tend to be perceived as more subjective' (p. 166). Such elements are more difficult to be represented by legitimate criteria that arise from the application of formal logic and scientific calculus, resulting in concrete, measurable elements and outcomes. In general, this problem relates to the general and vague framing of social sustainability, compared with the other dimensions (cf. Dillard et al. 2009)

There are also historical reasons behind this imbalance. The discourse on social sustainability lags behind discourses on how the 'environment' links with 'economy'. Although the FSC gave considerable space for social sustainability aspects already from the start, the eco-modernist approach that emphasise the fruitful combination of ecological and environmental dimensions were arguably the most influential discourse at the time when the FSC was planned and initiated. A more serious focus on social sustainability aspects did not grew until after the millennia shift, as a response to, first, the increasingly hegemonic sustainability approach and second, the escalating criticism voiced by members that the FSC failed in its ambition to incorporate the social aspects successfully. One informant that had key roles in both early and later stages of the FSC development argues that the standards that were set during the early 1990s mainly reflected only environmental sustainability. This informant acknowledges the greater attention to social issues the last years, but the FSC specifically and the forest sector in general has not yet managed to incorporate them sufficiently. He continues:

the environmental issues are more or less internalised in the forest sector globally, at least in the progressive part of it where you actually consider certification. They have internalised the environmental issue as a kind of necessary production cost, which is not questioned. The forest sector globally has not, so far, understood that the social costs and the social work is an equally necessary part of responsible production. It is still seen as a kind of hanger-on. (author's translation)

A third aspect concern how the FSC framework itself has contributed to participatory and empowerment aspects on the local level (which subsequently may affect the capacity of social stakeholders to make an impact on standards and policies on the transnational level; cf. next section). Informants can report both social benefits and problematic aspects in relation to this aspect.

The benefits relate to empowerment of local organization, which is an indirect effect of the implementation of the FSC framework, and an extremely important such due to several informants. They refer to how workers and local communities previously had ultimately no experience of organization and collective action. One informant from a southern country talks about the problem that local communities generally are not organized, but ‘once the communities is searching for FSC they have to be better organized, they have to organize an association or a cooperative, have to develop rules ...’. Some informants mention how the FSC framework has an effect in that social stakeholders are educated about ILO-standards and other global and national rules and rights. It can also help raising awareness of the local forest management plan:

‘now when the FSC local communities are really involved, they know exactly what the management plan is ... what are their rights and what are their duties. So, this is the things that are really a marvellous improvement in the forest management in the tropics’ (Informant from a regional office in the FSC administration).

Moreover, the framework requires certified forest companies to engage in a dialogue with, and take into account the concerns of indigenous peoples, local communities, and workers. ‘We have the chance to actually demand our rights’, an informant from a developing country argues. Several informants also mention that the FSC framework and procedures have contributed to an improved dialogue *within* local communities. There might be a number of conflicts among inhabitants in the communities. Those who work in the forestry might not have the same interest as have non-workers who use natural resources in the forestry.

One problem, however, is to define what a local community actually is. Some informants argue that a ‘community’ cannot be seen as one entity in which all inhabitants share the same interest. Rather, people from the same community may very likely have different interests in relation to a forest area and its natural resources. Existing tensions might stand in the way for a dialogue to be set up in the first place. Moreover, the FSC certification requires at least some level of a functioning local infrastructure. There need to be a sufficiently functioning local infrastructure and institutions (if not to say democracy), in which for example various stakeholder are allowed and empowered to voice their concerns. Yet, many tell it is extremely difficult to reach this level of functioning.

A related problem is unclear land rights. In the FSC system, it is the landowner who can be certified, but in many parts of the world it is very unclear, or there are heated tensions regarding, who is the land owner. Sometimes land users have no formal ownership or rights to the land but have by custom a tradition to make use of its natural resources (e.g. cultivation, grazing). According to the FSC standards, such custom rights should be respected. Yet, custom rights may conflict with legislation, and tensions may arise for example if big forest companies buy land, claim ownership, and set up a plantation. An informant from the FSC Secretariat addresses this topic, which is particularly serious in Africa, and mentions there is little FSC can do in case the national legislation and government hinders local communities their rights to their land.

A fourth aspect concerns the difficulties involved in certifying small-scale. Several informants confirm something that has been observed in previous literature on the FSC specifically (Meidinger et al. 2003) and green labelling more generally (Boström & Klintman 2008). The majority of certified forests appear in the developed part of the world and within big forest companies, rather than in small family or community based forestry (Pattberg 2007:125). This is ironic because FSC has from the start attempted to encourage certification in developing countries and for small scale operations (see also Meidinger et al. 2004). Preparing for certification is not without costs and requires some level of administrative, management and technical skills. There seems to be an 'economies of scale' involved in certification, accordingly. Almost from the start, the FSC has sought to simplify and make it less costly for small landowners to certify their forests, for example through a system of group certification (in the so called SLIMF [Slow and Low Intensity Managed Forests] project. Informants welcome the measures taken but: 'Even amongst our group schemes, including the SLIMF, it's the bigger, wealthier landowners who are certified. You know the smaller people aren't certified purely because they perhaps don't have the technical know-how to do the administration around certification.' (Informant representing economic chamber, south). A few informants also mention all the obstacles involved in making a community competitive in an international market: 'they have to compete on volume, quality, timely delivery; a whole load of technical factors which weight against them' (informant from the FSC secretariat).

Finally, it is necessary to draw attention to the tension between the need for universal standards and local adaptation. Several informants touch on this topic in various ways. Social sustainability means very different things for people in various parts of the world. 'In

Denmark it's mainly for recreational purposes you use the forest. I mean, you go for a walk or maybe you go collect some mushrooms or a few other things. But nobody is depending on forest resources for their survival in Denmark.' (Informant from an environmental NGO in Denmark working on empowerment issues and forest certification in the South). The situation could be quite the opposite in many other parts of the world. Therefore, it can be a bit challenging to come to mutual understanding in a transnational standardization project as well as to reach agreement on precise and prescriptive standards and policies.

On the one hand, the FSC has, according to most informants, achieved a number of tangible benefits in terms of social sustainability. On the other hand, the difficulties and challenges seem to predominate, which also is acknowledged in the FSC-document 'FSC Social Strategy: Building and implementing a social agenda', which was issued in 2003 two years after the FSC established its 'Social Strategy'. One of the informants from a southern country that himself talked about several good examples, still made a rather disappointing final judgement: 'it's too few examples'.

A number of factors may account for the difficulties involved in incorporating social criteria, and I have mentioned the general and vague – and as some perceive it 'subjective' – framing of social sustainability, the historical hegemonic focus on the merging of solely environmental and economic aspects (ecological modernization approach), hard conditions in local settings, as well as the 'economies of scale' involved in certification. One could also say that achieving social sustainability is indeed a tremendously ambitious objective given the extremely problematic circumstances worldwide that the FSC tries to change, as a previous FSC Board member representing economic/north indicated in an interview: 'It is not possible to believe that FSC should be able to solve within ten years what the UN has not solved within 40 years.' In addition to these explanations, the difficulties involved in achieving social goals may also relate to a particular aspect of social sustainability, namely the *participation* of actors that could be seen as representing the values and concerns of social sustainability. In the remainder of the paper, I will relate this topic to the difficulties in mobilizing, organizing, and categorizing actors representing these social concerns.

The representation and power resources of 'social' stakeholders

As mentioned earlier, each individual or organizational member of the FSC is sorted into one of the three chambers - social, environmental and economic – which clearly resembled the

emerging sustainability discourse (Pattberg 2007:109). A main aim of the chosen organizational design was to ensure that no group can dominate policy-making and also that the North cannot dominate at the expense of the South. This division of power between South and North has to be understood in relation to the tensions between developed and developing countries during the 1980s. The tensions arose after intensive campaigning against rainforest destruction and tropical timber boycotting, which gave the dubious impression that forestry in the North is good but bad in the South.

The FSC has struggled to achieve a balanced representation of members from the different chambers, but there is still underrepresentation of ‘social’ stakeholders. In August 2008 FSC had 784 members of which 357 were from developed (‘Northern’) countries and 427 from developing (‘Southern’) countries. 310 of the members belonged to the economic chamber, 326 to the environment chamber and 148 to the social chamber.² While the ‘social stakeholders’ appear under-represented, the FSC appears, on the surface, to have managed well recruiting participants from developing countries. Yet, representation from the South cannot merely be counted in numbers. An informant from the FSC Secretariat told there is much greater share of members *as individuals* from the social chamber as well as from the South compared to the other chambers and the North, which have more *organizations* as members. Within the FSC, organizations shall have 90 % of the voting power and individuals 10 % in each chamber. In what follows I will analyse the capacity among social stakeholders to take part and make an effective impact on the standards and policies of the FSC by using the notion of power resources.

Material power resources

First, we may speak of *material power resources*, which include both financial resources and (paid or voluntary) labour. Within transnational standard-setting processes, material power resources are critically important, even more so than in national-level regulation. It has to do with the capacity to participate regularly in standard-setting activities in various parts of the world, as well as the working capacity to make any kind of preparation before decision-making. As seen in previous studies of standard-setting work, participants do not have equal opportunities to participate, simply because of their unequal access to financial resources (Schmidt and Werle, 1998; Tamm Hallström, 2004). Several informants make a remark there

²http://datamints.fsc.org/fileadmin/webdata/public/document_center/publications/newsletter/newsletter_2008/FS-C-PUB-20-06-08-2008-08-11_FINAL.pdf 2008-08-19.

is a huge asymmetry in the access to such resources particularly comparing members from the economic chamber and members from the social chamber. An informant from the FSC Secretariat tells they ‘would like to see more participation, real participation of social groups, social organizations, civil society organizations, trade unions in FSC’. But the problem is that they have no money. He continues:

in many cases even the internet is not a good solution because if you want to get down really to the people most affected by forest activities, they don’t have access to the internet. It’s not only physical access, it’s a technological exclusion. Some places in the world they don’t have electricity.

Symbolic power resources

Second, we may speak of symbolic power resources, which include assets such as a name and logo that is associated to a particular organization. Indeed, NGOs are the most trusted forms of organizations, not only ranked above corporations but also above governments, churches, and the media (Jordan & Van Tuijl 2005:13; Van Rooy 2004:88ff). However, within the FSC, environmental NGOs such as WWF appear to rank higher than social NGOs. For example, informants from the economic chamber mention environmental NGOs, not social NGOs, when they are talking about the most influential and appreciated actors within the FSC, which resembles the observation discussed in the previous section that environmental aspects take precedence over social aspects in the FSC framework. Although social NGOs as a group have the same formal voting power as environmental NGOs, they do not have the same symbolic status according to some informants, as the following:

In mass media you only read about labour unions when it is about problems. You read about how labour unions organize strikes. Otherwise you seldom read about them. We are many times seen as something negative ... workers are causing troubles and so on ... That is the common picture of a labour union (Representative of a labour union)

Cognitive power resources

Third, we may speak of cognitive power resources, which include everything from language skill (in the case of the FSC, speaking English or Spanish), on the ground experiences, sensitivity to different cultural traditions, ability to provide technical expertise in the matters that are subject for standard setting and certification, as well as capacity to provide alternative framings, arguments and viewpoints. Because of actors’ different histories and locations in the social landscape, they have different access, experiences and abilities to provide

knowledge, experiences, and information (cf Van Rooy 2004:81ff). A NGOs such as the WWF has such a big budget (US\$332 million in income 2002; Mason 2005:43) and extensive network (office in 90 countries), and therefore fairly unique researching opportunities. In the FSC, environmental NGOs have yet a couple of advantages compared with social NGOs. First, they played key agenda-setting role early during the establishment of the FSC and are therefore well familiar with the frames that permeate the FSC principle and criteria. Second, in transnational standard-setting an important cognitive power strategy is claims of representing the global view or a claim on universality (Van Rooy 2004:79). Informants maintain it is easier for environmental NGOs to frame a global, not local, view on various problems. ‘You can talk with Greenpeace or WWF and they will give you global views’ (informant representing economic/North). They argue that local actors from the social chamber generally lack this capacity and tend to have a very local perspective. Such local perspectives from hugely different countries may be difficult to reconcile. This skill relates to an ability to handle tensions that easily arise between the double need for universal standards and local adaptation, which I discussed in the previous section.

It appears particularly more difficult for indigenous and local community groups to have someone representing and aggregating their view in the global organization. In her study of transnational social movement organizations, Jackie Smith (2005) found it was more difficult for southern affiliates within such organizations to relate their local concerns to global campaigns than it was for northern affiliates. Beck (2005) relates power ‘in the global age’ with capacity to move from a national outlook towards a global (‘cosmopolitan’) view. The cosmopolitan outlook, according to him, involves a transnational frame of reference and includes understanding of global interdependencies and how national and global risks and crises interact.

Social power resources

Finally, we may speak of social power resources that include what scholars generally associate with ‘social capital’, i.e. access to networks. Social power resources include ability among actors to link to or to establish formal or informal co-operation or alliances. Certain NGOs may be extraordinarily well trained and organizationally structured to establish links, networks or alliances among groups on a global scale (cf. Kekk & Sikkink, 1998; Smith 2005). Informants representing ‘economic’ and ‘social’ categories talk about the

organizational and networking skills of global environmental NGOs, which can assume chamber leadership.

We note from our interviews the importance of establishing common viewpoints both within a chamber and with stakeholders from the other chambers. Otherwise it is difficult to make an impact. The trick is to find collaborating partners both *within* and *across* chambers. Capacity to use this power strategy to develop such alliances derive from networking skills, frame bridging skills, leadership experience, and resources to arrange meetings, seminars and workshops. These abilities differ remarkably among environmental and social NGOs.

Basically all our informants talked in different ways of the fragmented feature of the social chamber, in contrast to the other more integrated chambers. The social chamber includes a diverse cluster of groups and individuals representing indigenous people, local communities, labour interests, small land-owners, and individual academics, which are groups often having an antagonist relationship towards each other, or at least distinctly different interests. For example, an informant representing a group of indigenous peoples say that it is difficult to see common threads within the social chamber and therefore difficult to identify oneself with it. Precisely as it seems difficult to sort out and categorize (frame) social criteria (previous section) it seems difficult to lump together such a heterogeneous group of actors.

In relation to social power resources it is also important addressing the differences involved in, on the one hand, being a representative of an organization or at least having an organizational belonging, and on the other participate as an (unorganized) individual. As mentioned earlier, there are relatively many individuals within the social chamber and from ‘southern’ countries. Informants maintain that those without affiliation to an organization tend to be weaker. An individual who wants to be strong, needs to be backed up by an organization and having access to its collective resources (Ahrne 1994); and this is even more true on the transnational scene. Furthermore, it is easier to claim that you speak on behalf of a broader group of interests if you participate as a representative of an organization. According to an informant from the FSC-secretariat, the southern individuals are often academics or people with particular interests, often middle-class people. Such a person cannot easily be said to represent the ‘people’ of the South

Among the ‘social’ stakeholders, labour unions appear as the strongest ones, which is mentioned by basically all informants, and which relate to the fact that standards for labour conditions and rights were seen as fairly well covered and addressed in the FSC framework compared with standards for indigenous people and local communities. An informant from a group of indigenous peoples says that

we have completely different prerequisites. I experience that they can work with much more emphasis and that they have another type of organization and economic basis from which they can work, and therefore are able to participate actively in the chamber or in the board and so on.

In sum, we have seen that material, symbolic, cognitive, and social power resources appear to be unequally distributed within the FSC. Although the social categories as a group has formally one third of the voting power, there are clear indications that they have less power resources in all these four dimensions; which give them a disadvantage position to participate effectively and to speak for social sustainability concerns. Difficulties appear both on the local and transnational level.

Implications of scale, time, and complexity for participation

As a final reflection of this section, I want to emphasise three factors or dimensions that even more complicate the issue. First, it is necessary to take into account difficulties that arise from the *transnational scale* of the standard-setting, which for example requires extra material (travelling budget) and cognitive (framing a global view) capacity. Second, the fact that this kind of sustainability project is a *permanent, regular* activity creates both material and ideological obstacles for participation, particularly for social stakeholder categories. If a transnational standard-setting process is stretched in time, or even has a permanent feature – as in the FSC – it is even more difficult for all (but particularly some) stakeholders to participate. It is easier organizing broad inclusion of stakeholders for a policy process that occur only during one meeting compared with one that go on year after year. Long term commitment as such may, not the least, conflict with the core activities, the ideologies or ‘movement-identity’ of particular stakeholders such NGOs or SMOs (Tamm Hallström & Boström, forthcoming). Third, over time, the standard-setting work tends to be increasingly bureaucratic and complex (ibid.). The governance structures and processes become much more complex with forums for decision-making, stakeholder consultation (for both members and non-members), expert advice, ad hoc groups, and special workshops as well as regional

and national governance and organizational structures. Several of our informants comment on this increasing complexity and time-consuming negotiation processes. It thus becomes more difficult for any stakeholder – also the strong ones – to gain oversight and to know where to focus attention, resources and strategies. *Inter alias*, it is more difficult for actors with little material, cognitive, and social power resources to do so.

Conclusion

The FSC is often described as an exemplary and leading example of novel and ambitious rule-setting for sustainable business, and one of the things that are appreciated is the combining of social, environmental and economic goals and aspects. However, this paper has shown that the inclusion of social sustainability within the FSC has indeed been a challenging task.

Although most selected informants perceive a number of social benefits involved in the FSC certification, the difficulties in fulfilling social goals seem to dominate. Most of these ‘failures’ should not be seen as a lack of real willingness within the FSC to fulfil its mission. Rather, several issues are very difficult for such an organization as the FSC to tackle. Indeed, many of the tasks that the FSC sets out to do require that good infrastructures and institutions are already in place, locally and transnationally. This has to do with cognitive (education, culture), organizational, political (democratic rights), and economic aspects. One might say it is difficult to work for (standardize and certify) social sustainability unless there is some degree of social (and economic) sustainability already in place.

The difficulties also concern organizational and participatory aspects of the FSC standard setting, policy making, and certification. There is a link between social sustainability in terms of process – effective and democratic participation – and substance – standards that can improve social aspects such as labour conditions. Precisely as it seems difficult to sort out and categorize (frame) social criteria it seems difficult to lump together such a heterogeneous group of actors. The very fragmentation of the social chamber gives it a disadvantageous position in the preparation and coordination of views before decision-making (cf. Tamm Hallström & Boström, forthcoming). It is also more difficult to recruit members to the social chamber as well as to assure effective participation. Material, symbolic, cognitive, and social power resources are unequally distributed among members within the FSC, which give them a disadvantage position to mobilize for and voice their social sustainability concerns.

Equal formal opportunities, as through the tripartite chamber structure, thus do not seem to be a sufficient means for long-term incorporation of social sustainability. In addition, there is a need to actively empower weaker stakeholder through various means (cf. *ibid.*). Indeed, to some extent, the FSC does empower weak stakeholders. There is, for example, possible for southern members to get some funding for travelling to FSC General Assemblies. The FSC can also empower weak stakeholders with cognitive resources, such as providing training, education or information, or assisting with translation. The FSC also tries to provide forum in which different stakeholders can meet, thus empowering stakeholders' social capital and networking abilities.

However, FSC itself faces serious scarcity of financial resources, so there is certain limits what the FSC can do in this regard. Informants from the FSC Secretariat speak very warmly about the role of some international NGOs, for instance WWF, and governmental development organizations for capacity building services. Such assistance may be very welcome, but raises a number of other concerns. One could, for instance, discuss the fact that northern based environmental NGOs try to empower and speak on behalf of southern based social constituencies. Is there a risk that the former focus (too) much on environmental sustainability and miss important aspects of social sustainability? Are there important trade-offs between these dimensions of sustainability that are neglected? One could argue that such possible trade-offs need to be discussed in an open political debate among actors with symmetric power resources. At least, this is a topic that needs to be investigated and discussed much more in further research.

The FSC is appreciated for the high ambitions to integrate social, environmental and economic sustainability, but still faces serious challenges. As the FSC project indeed is a significantly serious effort, with more than fifteen years ambitiously working on this topic, I argue it is possible to infer that the observed challenges will be of key concern in basically all sustainability projects of similar kinds, in any sector. Any transnational rule-setting organizations with high and serious ambitions to integrate all these sustainability dimensions will much likely face such huge challenges that have been observed in this study. The FSC at least provides a regulatory framework and an organizational and discursive platform to channel the issue and make room for a serious debate on the topic.

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