Flare 2018 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: Rethinking forestry education - transformative learning for a common future

Previous hierarchical governance of forest resources has ostensibly given way to more participatory approaches emphasizing inclusive solutions for forested landscapes that support diverse livelihoods and business sectors. However, strong structural and commercial interests in favor of traditional forestry practices persist. Processes towards finding common solutions requires new ways of thinking about forestry and the landscape. Participation in forest-related decision-making is often orchestrated by intermediaries, by forestry experts and professionals that can greatly influence the process. Their individual interpretations and perspectives are therefore of importance. The question asked is how forestry education can foster collaborative practices in support of participatory democracy in the forest sector.

Globally, higher-education of foresters remains predominantly oriented towards learning subject-specific knowledge and skills such as biology, ecology, wood technology and forest economics. These are competencies relevant for the market, but not necessarily the type of personal abilities and skills needed to foster a collaborative practice in support of participatory democracy. A common understanding of problems and solutions presupposes awareness and understanding of one's own perceptions and norms. Transformative learning aims to raise students’ self-awareness and self-reflection, and help the individual to become a more autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purposes rather than to uncritically act upon those of others. Such learning is central to citizenship in a modern democracy where effective collaborative problem-posing and -solving is needed. The learning thus becomes a political act that challenges dominant interests and epistemologies.

By introducing more transformative learning elements in the curricula of forestry higher-education and fostering a collaborative practice the mismatch between educational training and the need for more participatory democracy can be at least partially overcome. The presentation will critically examine practical findings of a transformative learning intervention, and convey challenges and opportunities to integrating such elements in regular forest higher-education curricula.