

Translating Decentralization in Conservation

Decentralization of Conservation Management in Norway and Sweden – Different Translations of an International Trend

Eirin Hongslo, Department of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning, University of Life Sciences. Corresponding author
e-mail: eirin.hongslo@nmbu.no

Sissel Hovik, Department of Public Administration, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences.
e-mail: sissel.hovik@hioa.no

Anna Zachrisson, Department of Political Science, Umeå University
e-mail: anna.zachrisson@pol.umu.se

Aase Kristine Lundberg Aasen, Department of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning, University of Life Sciences
e-mail: aase.kristine.lundberg@nmbu.no

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Abstract

International policy trends are always transformed and translated to fit the political and administrative systems in which they are introduced. An international trend of decentralization has resulted in conservation management systems in Sweden and Norway that differ, both in the choice of institutional solution and in the scope of change. This is surprising, as conservation management in the two countries was originally very similar. Nature conservation was managed through hierarchical systems dominated by bureaucratic experts. While Sweden has introduced co-management in a few protected areas only, Norway has devolved powers in all large conservation areas to inter-municipal management boards. Through document studies, we investigate how decentralization interacts with the broader systems of political actors and institutions of which nature conservation is a part.

Decentralization, conservation management, policy change, actor mobilization, institutions

1. Introduction

Traditional hierarchical or top down nature conservation management has been strongly criticized over the past few decades (Ghimire and Pimbert 1997, Zachrisson 2009a). This has caused an international policy trend promoting decentralization of nature conservation management, following a normative pathway (Fauchald, Gulbrandsen, and Zachrisson 2014). The Biodiversity Convention, Agenda 21, and IUCN (UNCED 1992, IUCN 2015) introduce non-binding norms —“soft law” — for direct public participation and community involvement, as well as for a range of scientists and practitioners, in nature conservation management (See Reed 2008 for a review). These conventions

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and organization do not formulate a solution or model, but rather communicate an idea for the democratization of natural resource management — a process often fraught with conflict and lacking legitimacy — which each country must operationalize and fill with content.

Most of the research on decentralization of nature conservation management investigates cases from developing countries (Agrawal and Ribot 1999, Ribot 2004, Larson and Soto 2008). Many of the studies from developed countries cover co-management specifically (Jentoft 1998, Riseth 2003, Zachrisson 2009c, a, b), and to a lesser extent the relationship between these initiatives and the wider policy context. A few papers focus on other Scandinavian decentralization initiatives. Falleth and Hovik (2009) and Hovik et al. (2010) discuss the relationships between the central government and municipalities in nature conservation management in Norway and Norway and Sweden, respectively. Fauchald et al. (2014) discuss how Norway and Sweden fulfill their international obligations through nature conservation in general, while Fauchald et al. (2012) raise concerns about the ability of the new Norwegian model to fulfill conservation objectives in large conservation areas. Sandström et al. (2008) focus on local contexts to explain the emergence of self-organized local management in Sweden, while Zachrisson and Beland Lindahl (2013) show that collaboration is much more unlikely in forest conservation due to the strong economic interests involved.

In this paper, we study the choice of institutional design for decentralized conservation management in Norway and Sweden. We are interested in the introduction of new policy and not in the effects of the new models as such. Scandinavian countries have a long tradition of decentralized management in other policy fields (Sellers and Lidström 2007), notably welfare policies. Extensive decentralization is also found within environmental policies in both Norway and Sweden (Christiansen 1996, Hovik and Reitan 2004, Lundqvist 2004). Until recently, however, conservation area management in both countries was centralized, but now both countries have decentralized nature conservation management (Zachrisson 2009c, Fauchald and Gulbrandsen 2012). One motivation for these policy changes has been a series of conflicts between central and local

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governments in relation to conservation management (Falleth and Hovik 2009, Hovik, Sandström, and Zachrisson 2010, Reitan 2004). Another motivation has been to respond to international policy trends. Both nations have signed international conventions that promote decentralization of natural resource management (Hovik, Sandström, and Zachrisson 2010).

The literature on comparative public policy, policy change, and policy transfer all emphasize the importance of considering the national policy context when explaining a country's response to international trends (Béland 2009, Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005). None of the aforementioned studies on natural conservation management has considered such contextual factors when analyzing the implementation of new conservation policies.

In this paper, we ask how Norway and Sweden's responses to the international soft law demanding decentralization are influenced by their respective policy context. We compare the Norwegian and Swedish models and describe their differences by characterizing them based on Agrawal and Ribot's decentralization framework (1999). Further, when explaining the differences, we focus on both the formal institutional structure of the policy systems and on the actor mobilization behind the idea of decentralization in the two countries.

2. Theoretical Framework

The international decentralization trend accompanies a change in perceptions of nature conservation management. While people and governments previously considered conservation as a matter of managing nature and protecting it from human activity, they increasingly acknowledge a more complex relationship between nature and society and consider the social and cultural consequences of nature conservation and the ways in which biodiversity and natural qualities can depend on human activity (Cash et al. 2006).

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2.1 Three Types of Decentralization

The concept of decentralization is ambiguous, and in this paper we use Agrawal and Ribot's definition of decentralization as "any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy" (1999: 475). They distinguish between two types of decentralization: (1) *democratic decentralization* and (2) *deconcentration*. Democratic decentralization implies that a politically elected and downwardly accountable body, for instance a municipality, is granted new powers. In deconcentration, power is ceded to local offices of central government agencies, all upwardly accountable in a hierarchical system. Furthermore, Ribot (2004) outlines a third type, (3) *privatization*, which occurs when power is devolved to customary authorities, NGOs, or individuals/corporations. Agrawal and Ribot (1999) consider *democratic decentralization* more appealing than deconcentration and privatization because it empowers local people and prioritizes their needs and preferences.

Agrawal and Ribot (1999) propose that decentralization requires detectable changes in *actors, power, and accountabilities*. First, it matters which *actors* powers are transferred to. Actors may be elected members of political institutions, or representatives of commons, NGOs, and village associations. All of these have particular positions in their communities in terms of power, ideology, and social status. They also have different objectives for their participation in local management. Consequently, any combination of these actors will lead to a specific outcome different from all others and will be accountable to a different set of people or institutions (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Second, Agrawal and Ribot distinguish between four *types of power*: "(1) the power to create rules or modify old ones, (2) the power to make decisions about how a particular resource or opportunity is to be used, (3) the power to implement and ensure compliance to the new or altered rules, and (4) the power to adjudicate disputes that arise in the effort to create rules and ensure compliance" (1999: 476). The room for maneuver will depend on the kind of power the management body holds.

Lastly, Agrawal and Ribot consider *accountability* to be relational and to be seen as a "counter-power to balance arbitrary actions" (1999: 478). In decentralization, downward

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accountability—where public actors can be held accountable by local constituencies—is central because it broadens participation through the involvement of local actors. However, accountability goes both ways, and is directed upwards when actors are responsible to institutions higher in the hierarchy. Accountability is exercised in a number of ways (in both directions): through elections, referenda, legal recourse, the media, NGOs, political pressure, and so on (Agrawal and Ribot 1999).

2.2 The Policy Context

As the international decentralization trend cannot explain the differences between Norway and Sweden (Fauchald, Gulbrandsen, and Zachrisson 2014), other domestic factors deserve attention. The literature on policy convergence and policy change holds that international policy trends are always modified through domestic policy processes, in order to fit into the national institutional context (Béland 2009, Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005). Bureaucratic and organizational actors center their policy choices on an already existing repertoire of institutional procedures, technologies, and organizational forms (Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005, March and Olsen 1989, Lindblom 1959); institutional patterns that challenge established forms and procedures are likely to be considered unfit. In other words, institutional path dependencies are important constraints to policy change (Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005).

Decentralization necessarily means deviation from the hierarchical structure, but the changes can vary both in kind and scope as well as in the challenge they pose to existing policy. The sectors rarely initiate policy changes that deviate radically from dominating policy paradigms. Such changes require mobilization of outside actors (Béland 2009, Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005, Hall 1993). In order to explain variation in both kind and scope of decentralization, we therefore look outside of the nature conservation sector and focus on whether and how actors and structures surrounding the sector influence the countries' responses to the decentralization trend.

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2.2.1 Institutional settings

As stated previously, international organizations, like the UN and the EU, and expert communities have all promoted the idea of decentralization in nature conservation management. Béland (2009: 710-11) suggests that implementation of international policy ideas in national policy goes through a process of symbolic and institutional *translation*. The policy alternatives must be adaptable to a particular institutional context to be promoted to the public. As institutions provide the context in which policy changes are defined, there needs to be an “institutional fit” between existing institutional arrangements and the institutional implications of the new policy (Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005: 801-802). This is also in line with arguments in neo-institutional organizational theory, which argue that “modern” organizational trends (or “myths”) are translated to the receiving organization (Røvik 2007). Furthermore, the final policy design will be constrained by the policy style of the country (Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005). Policy styles are characteristics of a nation’s political-administrative system that spans various policy areas.

Several of the classical studies of comparative environmental policy argue that characteristics of the political-administrative system are decisive to the approach to new environmental policy (Lundqvist 1980, Vogel 1986, Christiansen 1996). Following this trail, we argue that the adoption of decentralization will reproduce the dominant pattern of integration of local government and affected interests into other policy processes (Lundqvist and Christiansen 1996).

We argue that municipalities are more likely to be considered relevant bodies of power in nature conservation management in systems where they have power in related issues, whereas countries with a salient tradition of administrative corporatism will find local participation through co-management more attractive than countries with a less corporatist tradition.

2.2.2 Actor mobilization

The actors that participate in the policy process and the arenas in which deliberations and decisions take place influence the choice of type of decentralization. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on agenda-

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setting or framing (Jones and Baumgartner 2012, Béland 2009). Periods of stability in policy are disrupted by the entry of new policy ideas (True, Jones, and Baumgartner 2007) or new framings of existing ideas (Béland 2009). New ideas or framings may mobilize new actors and connect the issue to new policy arenas (Béland 2009, True, Jones, and Baumgartner 2007). Radical change in institutional design requires that the matter is lifted to the agenda of national politicians (Béland 2009, Hall 1993, Lenschow, Liefferink, and Veenman 2005, True, Jones, and Baumgartner 2007). Actors' ability to frame the issue along more stable political cleavages, such as between center and periphery, between urban and rural areas and between labor and capital, will determine their success (Rokkan and Lipset 1967, Rokkan et al. 1970, Ekengren 2012).

Based on these theoretical considerations, we make the following assumptions that we will investigate in this paper: First, the design of the political-administrative structure will influence the decision processes, the decision outputs and the actor mobilization (Egeberg 1999). Thus, countries with strong professional autonomy are likely to consider the organization of nature conservation management to be a question for professional bureaucracy, while countries with strong political government are likely to view it as matter for political consideration. Likewise, countries where local government has ample responsibility for natural resource management will be more likely to consider municipalities an addressee for other decentralized tasks. Furthermore, we expect that actor mobilization influences the scope of change. Local politicians with considerable responsibility for natural resource management will presumably mobilize for decentralization in that field, while such mobilization is unlikely in a corporate structure. In a system of political governance, there is also presumably a shorter distance between the local and central levels, through the party organizations. Thus, we expect institutional settings to produce a pattern of actor mobilization, which reproduces the institutional settings.

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3. Method

The main data sources for this comparative case study are public documents, which describe either the processes resulting in decisions of decentralized management models or the policy context, such as the division of responsibility between central, regional, and local levels of government. For Norway, the processes took place at national level and lead to systemic solutions. In Sweden, there were different processes for each national park. The documents are listed in the literature list. The majority of the documents covering these processes were collected during previous studies conducted by some of the authors, but (re-)analyzed for the purpose of this study. This analysis is complemented by secondary data reported in other previous studies (see literature list) of these processes, including both documents and interviews.

In a similar vein, the description of the *policy context* is partly based on public documents and partly on secondary data (see literature list), both collected for this study. Previous studies have thoroughly documented and described the general political-administrative systems and the division of responsibility between levels of government in Sweden. In the case of Norway, a public review from 2000 (NOU 2000: 22) is complemented by a review of current relevant legislation. In this study, we analyze processes and trends from a systemic perspective. Our aim is to analyze the importance of structural and political features of the political-administrative context, and we believe our study unveils important and interesting findings.

4. Results

4.1 *The New Management Models*

4.1.1 *A similar point of departure*

Sweden designated the first European national parks in 1909, while the first Norwegian national park was designated in 1962. The two countries have similar institutional structures. The authority to *designate* national parks and other large conservation areas rests with the central government (the

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King in Norway and the parliament in Sweden). Both historically and presently, designations are based on scientific assessments and professional recommendations made by central government agencies (Swedish Environment Agency (SEPA) and Norwegian Environment Agency (NEA)) and the regional branches of central government (County administrative boards (CAB) in Sweden and County Governor in Norway) (Nature Protection Act of 1954 , Swedish Government Bill 2008, SEPA 2008, Nature Diversity Act of 2009).

Until recently, the *management* of conservation areas also reflected these similarities. We believe our study unveils important and interesting findings, as central government agencies (SEPA and NEA) had the main responsibility for protected areas, while regional agencies (CAB and County Governors) had the management responsibility.

Despite their similar points of departure, Norway and Sweden have responded differently to international demands for decentralization of nature conservation management, both in scope and kind. The following comparison is based on Agrawal and Ribot's three dimensions: actors, powers and accountability, summarized in Table 1.

[Table 1 approximately here]

4.1.2 Norway – political decentralization through a comprehensive reform

In 2009 Norway launched a comprehensive reform, including all national parks and large conservation areas (St. prp. 1 2009-2010). The Ministry of Environment invited all affected municipalities to participate on conservation area boards, and the majority, 150 municipalities in 16 counties, accepted (Lundberg et al. 2013). By the end of 2014, the Ministry had appointed 37 boards (Norges nasjonalparker 2015).

The most comprehensive change in composition of *actors* is the transfer of responsibility for the day-to-day management from the County Governor to these local conservation area boards. These boards include elected politicians from affected municipalities and counties (St. prp. 1 2009-2010).

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Regarding *powers*, while municipalities commission the board members, the Ministry of Climate and Environment¹ formally appoints them (Nature Diversity Act of 2009). The boards have the power to compose and revise management plans, but the plans must be approved by the Norwegian Environment Agency (NEA; NEA 2015). In addition to the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the area, the boards have dispensing power. Board decisions may be appealed to the NEA (Nature Diversity Act §62).

As formally appointed by and directly subordinated to the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the boards are primarily accountable to the state (Nature Diversity Act § 62), but because the members are elected politicians, the board is also indirectly accountable to the local people. Thus, the reform represents a step towards democratic decentralization (See Table 1).

4.1.3 Sweden—privatization through ad hoc partnership processes

Since the mid-1990s, Sweden has taken small steps towards decentralization. The scope is limited and largely restricted to seven of twenty-nine national parks (Fulufjället; Zachrisson 2009c, Tyresta; SEPA and Stiftelsen Tyrestaskogen 2013, Koster; Morf 2006, and the four parks within the World Heritage site Laponia; Zachrisson 2009 b).

Regarding *actors*, both public and private actors were represented and had some degree of influence in the designation processes. The processes of Laponia WHS and Koster NP resulted in management regimes that can be characterized as co-management. The boards consist of representatives of municipalities (officers or politicians), officers from the CAB, and vested interests such as Sami communities, fishers, and environmentalists, and in Laponia the SEPA is represented (Laponiatjuottjudus 2011, CAB Västra Götaland 2009a, b). In Fulufjället, however, private actors are only represented through a consultative management council and a group which deals with tourism issues (Holmgren, Sandström, and Zachrisson forthcoming). Tyresta is a peculiar case in the Swedish context and only includes official representatives. Representatives from CAB and SEPA as well as

¹ The Ministry of Environment changed name to Ministry of Climate and Environment in 2014

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politicians from the municipalities are represented in the management board (SEPA and Stiftelsen Tyrestaskogen 2013).

Regarding *powers*, SEPA adopts management plans for national parks after consultation with the CAB, the affected municipalities, and the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (Swedish Government Regulation 1987). Dispensing power rests with the CAB, and decisions can be appealed to the Land and Environmental Court in Sweden (Environmental Code Chapter 7, Section 7; National Park Regulation NF 1987:38, Section 5). Day-to-day management is delegated to the boards (Laponia regulation 2011, CAB Västra Götaland 2009b, SEPA and Stiftelsen Tyrestaskogen 2013).

Finally, *accountability* is primarily directed upwards towards the respective CAB and the SEPA. However, because board members are appointed by their respective organizations, they are individually accountable to their constituencies (municipalities, NGO members, and so on). In Laponia where the municipal representatives are officers (Laponiatjuottjudus, 2015), they are indirectly accountable to the population in the constituency. Using Agrawal and Ribot's terms, the Swedish models can be labeled a mix of deconcentration and privatization.

4.2 The Emergence of the Models

4.2.1 Norway

Institutional setting

The central government of Norway is often characterized as a system of *Ministerial government* (Christensen, 2004). The ministries are relatively strong, with a weaker Cabinet, and the ministers are active and direct in their steering, leaving less autonomy for the professional bureaucracy in the ministries and subordinated agencies.

One may also characterize the Norwegian political-administrative system as decentralized, with strong municipal government at both local and regional (county) levels. Alongside broad responsibilities for welfare services, the municipalities and county municipalities have broad responsibilities for local and regional development (NOU 2000:22 2000). Starting in the 1960s, there has been a continuous trend of democratic decentralization to local municipalities, first within

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welfare services, and subsequently within development issues. The Planning and Building Act of 1985 gave extensive discretion to municipalities in land use planning and management inside as well as outside of the built-up areas (settlements), and the Planning Act of 2008 maintained and even increased these responsibilities. Municipalities are delegated responsibilities for the day-to-day management of forestry, agriculture, and wildlife (the Agriculture Act of 1995, the Forestry Act of 1965 and the Wildlife Act of 1981, with later revisions). The Motorized Traffic in Outlying Fields Act of 1977 assigns municipalities power to give allowances and dispensations. The Pollution Regulation Act of 2003 continued a trend of decentralization within that policy field. Concurrently, industrial development has been an important municipal responsibility and a core interest of local politicians, especially in district areas facing depopulation (NOU 2000:22 2000).

At the regional level, the relationship between the elected county municipality and the county governor is balanced (Baldersheim 2004: 187). During the last decade, the counties' role in developmental issues has become stronger (Amdam, Halvorsen, and Bakke 2014). The administrative reform of 2008 (Ot.prp.nr.10 2008-2009) resulted in the decentralization of responsibilities within a range of sectors: aquaculture, research, innovation, transport (roads), watershed management, wildlife and inland fishing, and, to a small extent, agriculture. Alongside the already wide responsibilities within regional planning and industrial development, these changes aimed to strengthen the developmental role of the counties.

As we have shown, local and county municipalities have broad responsibilities within land use, natural resource management², and industrial development, and there are several examples of collaborative projects on sustainable development involving local and county municipalities and private actors (See Hovik 2008, Falleth, Hovik, and Saglie 2008). Within this tradition of democratic decentralization, farmers, landowners, and other stakeholders at local and regional levels work closely with municipal government.

² Except in reindeer husbandry

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Actor mobilization

In Norway, local and regional responsibility for the management of conservation areas has been a topic of discussion for decades. In the late seventies, the debate focused on whether to place the regional environmental agency with the county governor or the county municipality (Jansen and Osland 1996). In 1982, it was placed with the state governor's office. In the early 1980s, local management of conservation areas appeared on the political agenda again with the establishment of Hardangervidda National Park (Reitan 2004). Rights holders' organizations and municipalities demanded influence on park management. Local institutions were given some power in issues concerning tourism, development, and agriculture, but the major management responsibilities remained with the county governor.

In 1980, the Ministry of Environment initiated a general plan for the designation of new large protected areas. This National Park Plan was presented in 1986 (NOU 1986:13 1986), and approved by the parliament in 1992 (St.meld. no. 62 1991-92). With the aim of protecting a representative sample of Norway's natural heritage (Reitan 2004), the plan recommended the designation of numerous new national parks and large protected landscape areas. This proposal triggered local rights holders and politicians around the country to lobby members of parliament. In their consideration of the National Park Plan, the Parliamentary Standing Committee called for more local participation in national park management (Innst. S. nr 124 1992-93), and subsequently local responsibility for managing *smaller* protected areas became an option.

This was, however, not the end of the story. When the parliament discussed the government proposal to establish a national surveillance agency in 1995 (Innst. O. nr 64 1995-96), the parliamentary majority requested that the government initiate decentralization of management responsibility to municipalities on an experimental basis. The non-socialist majority opposition in parliament followed up a year later. During the government's preparation for the designation of a large protected area in Setesdal-Vesthei, MPs from the affected counties issued a private proposition, demanding that this plan be subjected to parliamentary consideration (Dok 8:92 1995-

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96). The Parliament subsequently requested that the government initiate an administrative trial in three national parks and large protected areas under designation (Innst. S. nr 124 1992-93). A parliamentary majority of non-socialist parties thereby forced the labour minority government to initiate decentralization reform, despite objections from the professional administration. The Parliament requested an independent evaluation of the trials (Falleth and Hovik 2008). The experiences from the trials were crucial for the comprehensive reform launched in 2009. The chosen model, combining local participation and central control, represented a compromise between the advocates for local management and a somewhat sceptical environmental bureaucracy.

This story illustrates what Reitan (2004:439) calls a process of politicization in nature conservation policy in the wake of the National Park Plan, namely a transfer of power from the bureaucratic to the political arena. The discussions around decentralization of nature conservation management were central to this process. Local governments and interest organisations had been involved in the debate since the treatment of the National Park Plan and made strong claims for local participation in management (Reitan 2004: 443).

The process of politicization, as well as the success of local lobbying, should be understood against the backdrop of more general political cleavages in the Norwegian polity. The cleavage between the centre and the periphery is significant in Norwegian politics (Rokkan et al. 1970), and local resistance against central authority are both at the core of the nature conservation management debate (Reitan 2004: 446). Because the National Park Plan also affects private land and agricultural interests, the politicization can be interpreted as a result of a conflation of the center-periphery conflict and issues related to private ownership articulated along the left-right dimension (Reitan 2004: 446-447).

4.2.2 Sweden

Institutional setting

The Swedish public administration is often labeled *administrative corporatism* (Christensen 2004). It combines professional autonomy and correspondingly weak ministerial power with close linkages

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between the professional bureaucracy and organizational interests. The SEPA is subordinated to the Cabinet and is given wide professional discretion in the implementation of the political goals set by the National Assembly and Cabinet. Politicians, the professional bureaucracy, and interest organizations are linked through the SEPA transparency board (insynsråd SEPA 2014).

Sweden has a long history of local governance where municipalities have a constitutional responsibility to attend to the interests and welfare of their inhabitants, and therefore strong powers of taxation. Municipalities also have a monopoly on planning for land use, natural resources, and the built environment (Lundqvist 2004).

In the 1970s, municipalities became responsible for water supply, sewage treatment, and waste management (Corell and Söderberg 2005). Decentralization continued in the 1980s with the transfer of the authority to issue environmental permits to medium-sized and small plants and facilities to the municipalities. In 1991 local government in Sweden was reorganized. This weakened the municipalities, as environmental functions were diffused into other, structurally stronger local administrations (Lundqvist 2004). Consequently, CAB handles natural resource issues, while municipalities have limited mandates. The competence of the elected county municipal authority is limited to welfare services (Norén Bretzer 2010).

Actor mobilization

In Sweden, decentralization of nature conservation management has arguably been ad hoc and restricted to particularly challenging designation processes. The SEPA launched a national park plan in 1989 and subsequently initiated a number of designation processes. A limited number of SEPA and CAB officials drive these processes, with input from the concerned municipalities. In some cases, local resistance has been substantial; for example, national park processes stalled in both Kiruna and Southern Jämtland (Sandell 2005b, a). In Fulufjället, Koster, and the Laponia World Heritage Site the processes developed into close collaboration after lengthy conflicts (Morf 2006, Zachrisson 2009c, Hovik, Sandström, and Zachrisson 2010). In the case of Tyresta National Park CAB, SEPA and the municipalities jointly developed a trust fund to rescue the process from funding constraints (SEPA

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and Stiftelsen Tyrestaskogen 2013). As shown above, these management regimes differ in organization and in composition of actors. Their concerns were addressed locally and never reached the national agenda, although the Ministry of Environment was called upon in the Lapponia case (Green 2009).

At the national level, local dialogue and participation in nature conservation management was first emphasized in a government communication in 2001 (Swedish Government Bill 2001). In 2008 another government bill follows up (Swedish Government Bill 2008), although participation seems to regard landowners rather than the public or natural resource users. The bill includes a proposal that all national parks should have advisory management boards (Zachrisson 2009a), but this has not yet been implemented. The current National Park Plan emphasizes participatory designation processes as key to building local support, while it prescribes management to the CAB (SEPA 2008).

Rural and sparsely populated regions have lost political influence in Sweden and their representation in Parliament is decreasing. Their diminishing power has not yet significantly affected the political cleavages in Sweden, where the left—right dimension still dominates. The urban—rural, land—industry, and center—periphery cleavages exist and have to some extent been mobilized in relation to the wolf issue, which from time to time reaches the national agenda, but there are no signs that they have become more important over the last decades (Ekengren 2012).

5. Comparing Norway and Sweden

As shown in the previous chapter, Norway and Sweden has taken different paths in their decentralization of conservation management. While Norway has chosen what Agrawal and Ribot (1999) label *democratic decentralization* for all large conservation areas, Sweden has opted for *deconcentration/privatization* in a few. We argue that a combination of two factors may explain these differences: institutional setting and actor mobilization. While the differences in governance

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structures between the two countries can account for differences in kind of management, the differences in actor mobilization can account for differences in both kind and scope of change.

5.1 Institutional Settings and Kind of Decentralization

Our overarching assumptions stated that the political-administrative structure of a country strongly influences the kind of decentralization it implements. While both Norway and Sweden's nature conservation management were previously centralized and exhibited many of the same traits, there are important differences in the organization of public government that may explain the different outcomes of the decentralization processes. In the Swedish tradition, there are close linkages between central agencies and interest organizations and private actors. This laid the foundation for co-management or privatization-like models with management boards consisting of private and public actors. In Norway, however, there is a strong tradition of political governance of natural resources, both at the national and municipal level, which catered for boards with only political representation. These results confirm the assumption that in a context of strong professional autonomy (Sweden), the professional bureaucracy is strengthened through decentralization, while in a context of political governance (Norway), local politicians are strengthened.

The distribution of power and responsibilities between the tiers of government represents another difference between the two countries' institutional settings. This also confirms our initial assumption. Swedish municipalities have no responsibility for nature management issues, while Norwegian municipalities have wide responsibilities in natural resource and land use management. This difference may explain why decentralization to the municipal government was never considered in Sweden while it seemed like the natural choice in Norway.

5.2 Actor mobilization explaining kind and scope of change

Our data also confirm our assumption that political mobilization by actor groups depends on structural features. The institutional setting of the two countries influences which actors adopt the idea of decentralization and start mobilizing behind it. As shown in section 4.2.1, local politicians

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lifted local management to the national political agenda in Norway already in the 1980s. Nature conservation management represents a direct encroachment on municipal powers, particularly local spatial planning, and local politicians actively sought the responsibility for management of large conservation areas. In Sweden, the traditions of administrative corporatism and professional autonomy laid the foundation for deconcentration/privatization arrangements between local rights holders and the professional bureaucracy (CAB), and there was no pressure from local actors for democratic decentralization. This confirms our assumption that local politicians engage in decentralization debates when it concerns responsibilities that are similar to those they already have.

In addition, the differences in actor mobilization can also partly explain the differences in the scope of change between Norway and Sweden. Because municipal and regional politicians in Norway were successful in lifting the issue to the national policy agenda, they were able to instigate an all-encompassing reform of nature conservation management despite a reluctant or even resistant bureaucracy. Moreover, local involvement in protected area management has a much longer history in Norway. In Sweden, policy experts and local interest groups have dominated the process. We thus argue that the new policies follow familiar paths in both countries.

6. Concluding remarks

The existing literature on nature conservation management design often focuses on the features of the resource system and its users and rarely considers the constraints on the choice of institutional design for nature conservation management that broader national policy context represents. Our study confirms the notion that existing institutional settings condition institutional changes (2005). When facing demands for change, organizations tend to choose well-known solutions that easily fit within the broader political-administrative system. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the type of decentralization chosen in Sweden and Norway are adapted to each country's general political-administrative system.

The comparatively wider geographical scope of the decentralization in Norway compared to Sweden is the greatest difference between the two countries. In addition, a larger number of local

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politicians are involved in Norway, which creates a potential for democratizing nature conservation management. The advantage of the Swedish privatization-like model, where directly concerned interests have seats on the boards and participate in deliberations, may be that social learning increases consensus on the fulfillment of conservation objectives (Zachrisson 2009a). In addition, because each institutional solution in Sweden is designed for a particular conservation area, the models are presumably better adapted to the socio-ecological context.

Our study unveils a complex relationship between actors and institutions. We find support for our expectation that actor mobilization is crucial for the scope of change as mobilization of political actors seems to be necessary to devolve power to local political institutions. There are also reasons to believe that institutional setting influences actor mobilization. For instance, the division of responsibility between central and local government can partly explain why local politicians and local government gain influence in nature conservation management in Norway, and not in Sweden. Thus, different institutional settings lead to differences in degree of politicization of nature management in the two countries, while actor mobilization reinforces the existing power structure. In this case, democratic decentralization secures the influence of local politicians (Norway) while co-management secures the influence of the national bureaucracy and local stakeholders (Sweden).

Comparative studies including other countries would further explore how different national policy contexts condition different countries' responses to international policy trends. Furthermore, comparative studies of the different solutions in Sweden, Norway and other countries would contribute to the scrutiny of Agrawal and Ribot's (1999) hypothesis that democratic decentralization to locally elected politicians is more democratic than deconcentration and privatization. Our study opens the door for a competing hypothesis, that what is more important is how the type of decentralization fits a broader national institutional setting, i.e. that the Norwegian and Swedish models might be equally effective and democratic.

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Acknowledgements: This article is part of the project LOCALMAN funded by the Research Council of Norway. We would also like to thank three anonymous reviewers and participants at the panel “Partnership for rural sustainable development in the era of Anthropocene” at the Nordic Environmental Social Science Conference in Copenhagen 2013 for critical reading and useful comments.

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