Communities of Practice in non-industrial private forestry
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Katri Korhonen¹, Teppo Hujala², Mikko Kurttila³, Outi Virkkula⁴

¹University of Eastern Finland
²Finnish Forest Research Institute (Metla), Vantaa Unit
³Finnish Forest Research Institute (Metla), Joensuu Unit
⁴Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Oulu, Finland
Introduction:
Changes in private forestry (in Finland)

- “New“ forest uses (e.g. bioenergy and biodiversity protection) -> new decision making situations for private forest owners
- New kind of forest owners: economically less dependent and spatially estranged from their forest properties
- Changes in forest planning services and public guidance

- Old ways to reach and encourage forest owners for forestry decisions are not enough
- A potential model to diversify and renew guidance of forest owners is peer learning
1. What kind of peer learning exists among forest owners?
   • Theory: Communities of Practice
2. How could peer learning be enhanced?

| Theory: Communities of Practise | Data & Analysis | Results: Existing situation | Results: Possibilities and barriers of future | Conclusion |
Theory: Communities of practice (CoPs)

• “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do, and who interact regularly in order to learn how to do it better.” Wenger 2004

• CoPs:
  – Groups of people, who find value in their interaction and learn from the experiences of others
  – Develop the professional skills of members
  – Communication is easy and people know whom to ask - problems are solved more easily
  – Provide identity to members
Main elements of CoPs

• **Community (who)**
  – relationships, trust, cohesion and reciprocity between group members

• **Domain (what)**
  – the essential topic around which the community is gathered

• **Practice (how)**
  – customs and ways to share the knowledge
  – tools, methods and skills the community uses
Data and analysis

• 7 Focus group interviews in Finland (n=44)
  – National forestry extension developers (1)
  – Local forest professionals (4)
  – Forest owners (experienced 1, inexperienced 1)

• Discussion considered
  – Existing communication between forest owners
  – Benefits and drawbacks of possible peer learning

• Qualitative content analysis (themes: community, domain, practice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Practice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
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<td>Group 2</td>
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<td>Group 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Villagers, neighbours</td>
<td>No specific</td>
<td>Unofficial</td>
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<tr>
<td>The village or neighbourhood network in the countryside</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>Forest property</td>
<td>Unofficial</td>
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<td>Family and relatives, who own the forest together</td>
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<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Interested owners in the region</td>
<td>Specific topic of the project (e.g. bioenergy)</td>
<td>Lead by professionals</td>
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<td>Projects arranged by extension organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Interested owners in the region</td>
<td>Changing topics</td>
<td>Courses and lectures, lead by professionals</td>
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<td>Arranged events (courses, forest day) by the extension organizations</td>
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<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Interested owners in certain cities</td>
<td>Changing topics</td>
<td>Regular meetings of the club</td>
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<td>Clubs for forest owners in bigger cities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>No specified community</td>
<td>All kind of topics</td>
<td>Anonym discussions in web</td>
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<td>Discussion forums in Internet</td>
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</table>
Strong community: The village or neighbourhood network in the countryside

- Community
  - everyday interactions, long-term acquaintances
- Practice:
  - unofficial practices
  - one-to-one discussions
  - meetings of different interest groups (hunting clubs)
  - visible examples from other owners
- No specific domain (actions in forest, joint projects, the quality of forest services)
**Strong domain:**
Projects arranged by extension organizations

- **Domain:**
  - Specified topic, e.g. bioenergy and wood chips heating systems

- **Practice:**
  - Lectures and visits, lead by professionals

- **Community**
  - Interested owners in the region
  - The longer the project exists – more discussions and sharing experiences, searching for support among participants
Strong practice:
Clubs for forest owners in bigger cities

• Practice
  – Regular meetings (lectures, visits)
  – Unofficial discussions among members
  – Newsletters and web pages

• Domain
  – Aim is to increase members knowledge about the forests
  – Focus is on different issues every time

• Community
  – e.g. in Helsinki, Oulu, Joensuu
  – Most active owners
## Future possibilities, barriers and questions

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<tr>
<td>- Homogenous or heterogenous members?</td>
<td>- Topic should be <strong>focused and pre-defined</strong></td>
<td>- <strong>Face-to-face</strong> meetings are important</td>
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<td>- Mentors are a surplus</td>
<td>- Fear is that opinions or even <strong>wrong information</strong> can be delivered in CoPs as a truth</td>
<td>- <strong>Meetings in a forest</strong> are a surplus</td>
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<td>- Are Finns able to speak and share their experiences?</td>
<td>- <strong>Taboo issues</strong>: money, timber trade, hectares, nature protection</td>
<td>- Owners have <strong>no time to participate</strong></td>
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<td>- Small size of community is a surplus</td>
<td>- <strong>Easy to talk about</strong>: experiences of services, forest damages, silvicultural actions</td>
<td>- Controversial <strong>internet practices</strong>: an effective way to communicate or delivery of pure opinions?</td>
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Conclusion

At the moment:

– Practices are strongly based on activities of forest extension organizations
– Informal communities exist in the countryside, but are decreasing
– Need for new kinds of communities in cities

For the future:

– Focused and interesting domains are needed
– Suitable reference groups for different forest owners (women, retired, hunters, nature conservationists)
– Possibilities of internet could be utilized better, but needs studying and developing of practices
Thank You.