



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Forest Policy and Economics

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2014

Received in revised form 15 May 2015

Accepted 19 May 2015

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Political power

Forest owners associations

Forestry

Forest policy

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse the potential of forest owners associations (FOAs) to influence forest policymaking using power theory. Firstly, the paper examines the concept of power and the political power of interest groups. Interest groups seek to be able to use their power through influencing policy outcomes and framing the underlying dimensions that define policy issues. In the next step the paper defines factors of dispositional political power: formal, informal, internal, and external. Formal factors are primarily based constitutionally or legislatively and are ensured through the right to associate and form associations to advocate common interests. Informal factors represent the abilities of interest groups to operate in the political process. Internal factors represent the ability of interest groups to work within the group and external factors represent the behaviour towards other associations, government, non-governmental organisations, etc. Semi-structured questionnaires to former and present FOAs officials were used containing questions about the basic role of FOAs as they can be found in the scientific literature. The crucial internal factor limiting the dispositional power of FOAs is the lack of financial resources for providing services or necessary apparatus, which might strongly hinder the fulfilment and achievement of set goals in policymaking. The disinterest of the state bureaucracy towards non-state forests also limits FOAs' dispositional power. The most important external factor from the officials' perspective is the disinterest of the state bureaucracy towards non-state forests at the sectoral and cross-sectoral level. There is a common agreement between FOA officials that current strategies and tactics in the form of dialogue are inefficient. FOAs are considered as a partner in policy formulation, but their actual political power is low, due to the disunity among FOA leaders and ineffective strategies and tactics.

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1. Introduction

Interest groups play an important role in public policy. Interest groups participate in the political process in order to satisfy their interests and achieve their objectives. Some groups are more powerful than others, in the sense that they are better able to influence policy outcomes. They not only represent the interests and attitudes of a whole group, but also provide reliable information to the state that can be recovered in the legislative process. Stakeholder involvement and participation are considered vital for the successful implementation of sustainable forestry, and have gained increasing importance within forest policymaking and cross-sectoral coordination (Elsasser, 2002, 2007; Hognl and Kvarda, 2008; Juerges and Newig, 2014).

FOAs are one type of interest group in the forestry sector. Seen from the forest owners' point of view, at least two reasons exist

why establishing interest or stakeholder organisations makes sense. Firstly, interest groups exist in order to protect and represent the common interests of forest owners in the policymaking process. Second, they help in the improvement of forestry knowledge and forest management, for instance, through FOA services (Rametsteiner et al., 2005; Glück et al., 2010; Weiss et al., 2011). Associations of non-state forest owners can be divided into main groups mostly according to type of ownership (private, community, co-cooperatives, municipal, church) or territorial scope (regional, national, supranational, and international) (Weiss et al., 2011).

FOAs operate predominantly in the forestry sector. The sectoral approach is important in order to explain the power of forest owners as policy actors. Hubo and Krott (2007) define 'sector' in the context of three elements: (i) actor-related elements (advocacy coalitions, interests, or belief systems, etc.); (ii) political programmes and public policy measures; and (iii) institutional and related procedural compounds. Giessen and Krott (2009) contribute to the sectoral debate with so-called 'boundary behaviour', meaning that actors are assumed 'to define, to structure, to identify and to distinguish' sector boundaries. Such 'boundary behaviour' may be explained by beliefs and/or interests and in addition involves ensuring, defending, or even maximising the given degree of autonomy that sectors have.

[☆] Declaration of authors: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publishing of the paper by the Journal of Forest Policy and Economics and that the paper has not been published elsewhere, and does not include any form of plagiarism.

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FOAs are a stable member of the forestry coalition in Slovakia when it comes to the formulation of strategic forest policy documents (Dobšínská et al., 2013) and legislation. There are already several cases where they have actively participated in this arena, for example in the National Forest Programme (Sarvašová et al., 2014), or Rural Development Programme (Dobšínská et al., 2013). According to Dobšínská et al. (2013) an informal network of forestry actors exists that participates in forest policy formulation. This network consists mainly of members from state forestry administration, research institutes, FOA representatives, and other forestry interest groups. State bureaucracies consider FOAs as partners in policymaking.

In this article we focus on FOAs as political actors. Using Krott's (2005) definition, associations are organisations that articulate the interest of the groups they represent and attempt to implement them by lobbying politicians, similar to NGOs but with several special characteristics (Krott, 2005) or unlike bureaucracies, which aim at gaining and maintaining responsibility over political issues (Giessen et al., 2014).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the factors of political dispositional power for interest groups, using the example of FOAs in Slovakia. The potential impact of FOAs on forest policymaking will be analysed using power theory. First the concept of power will be explained, followed by proposing criteria for assessing the dispositional power of interest groups. Finally the criteria are applied for analysing the political power potential of Slovak FOAs.

2. Concept of power

There is a strong debate taking place among scientists about including power relations in forest policy analysis (Arts and van Tatenhove, 2004; Hassanagas, 2004; Krott, 2005; Giessen and Krott, 2009; Krott et al., 2013), especially when talking about actors.

When we think of power, we might initially think about how people, governments, and powerful groups in society can compel people to do things, often against their will. Some authors have focused on the ability to influence political process through power. Several faces of power were distinguished. The first face of power is the traditional one of who wins and who loses over a certain issue (Dahl, 1961). The second face refers to an actor's ability to set the agenda, and in particular to keep unwelcome issues off the agenda (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). Scholars argue that this sort of power, the coercion of one person by another, is one of the two faces of power. The other face is the ability to keep a person from doing what he or she wants to do; instead of a coercive power, the second face is a blocking power. In the first face of power, A participates in making decisions that affect B, even if B does not like the decisions or their consequences. In the second face of power, A prevents B's issues and interests from getting on the agenda or becoming policy, even when actor B really wants these issues raised. The third face relates to an actor's capacity to prevent other actors from recognising their genuine interests; weak actors' preferences are manipulated to such an extent that may actually be contrary to their fundamental interests (Lukes, 1974).

Some authors understand power as the ability of an actor to influence other actors to achieve a political outcome. They consider the actor as an object, which is included in the policy formulation and implementation process, where the formulation and implementation are considered as a result of actors' intervention. These actors can be individuals or organisations (Krott et al., 2013).

Arts and van Tatenhove (2004) define power as the organisational and discursive capacity of agencies, either in competition with one another or jointly, to achieve outcomes in social practices, a capacity which is, however, co-determined by the structural power of those social institutions in which these agencies are embedded. They define power as a part of structural layers and develop a three-layered model. Relational power focuses on the achievement of policy outcomes by agents' interactions, dispositional power focuses on the positioning of agents in arrangements mediated by rules and resources, and

structural power focuses on the structuring of arrangements mediated by orders of signification, domination, and legitimisation.

Krott et al. (2013) focus on actors by looking to their power sources and look on structural power as a part of rules, discourse, or ideologies. Arts and van Tatenhove (2004) point out that structural power refers to orders of signification, legitimisation, and domination that materialise in discourses as well as in political, legal, and economic institutions of societies.

2.1. Political power of interest groups

'An interest group is an organised association which engages in activity relative to governmental decisions' (Salisbury, 1975, 130). Contrary to political parties, interest groups do not strive for governmental responsibility. Interest groups are indispensable in the developed democratic political system (Glück, 1976). In the interest of the high political agenda of their members, interest groups solve political problems. For this purpose they use methods to raise public awareness in order to provide a response from political actors and to formulate appropriate programmes. Interest groups may be influential, but their political activities may be most effective when they are consistent with public opinion (Denzau and Munger, 1986; Kollman, 1998). Hansen (1991) suggests that interest groups may be influential, in part, because they provide information that is useful to legislators, including information about what the public wants, thus serving as useful intermediaries between the public and the government. They represent some groups better than others, but overall may enhance the impact of public opinion on public policy. Denzau and Munger (1986) argue that it makes sense for interest groups to focus their efforts on legislators whose constituents are divided, ignorant, or indifferent, because it is too costly to influence legislators whose constituents are informed and clearly on one side or another.

Most scholars agree that interest groups' endowment with resources furthers their capacity to influence decision-makers and policy outcomes (Gerber, 1999; Burstein and Linton, 2002; Hall and Deardoff, 2006). Interest groups' resources include money, legitimacy, political support, knowledge, expertise, and information. Interest groups can use their financial resources to support an incumbent or a challenger in electoral contests. By dealing with certain political or bureaucratic actors, interest groups may also be able to convey legitimacy upon them. Interest groups, moreover, can express their support for a politician in exchange for policies that favour their economic or other interests, which may influence the voting decisions of a rationally ignorant electorate. Most importantly, interest groups may have knowledge, expertise, and information that can facilitate the task of decision-makers (Crombez, 2002; Hall and Deardoff, 2006). Groups can 'make noise' by way of demonstrations, rallies, petitions, statements in the media, and participation in public debates. Groups can try to attain their objectives with such outside lobbying (Kollman, 1998). On the one hand outside lobbying can influence public opinion in favour of the demands of certain groups; on the other hand, it can be used to transmit information on policy preferences to politicians.

Bayers et al. (2008) denote the criteria that interest groups involved in the political process should meet. According to them, the degree of organisation and structuring is relevant which is natural for a group and defines it to the general public opinion. The criterion which narrows down the image in organised groups is the political interest to which promotion and achievement groups direct their influence on the development of policy decisions using the political defence of the interest. The interest group becomes a political actor reflecting the needs of its members. However, in the political process many of the actors represent the political interests of their supporters (such as political parties/movements); therefore, it is necessary to define the interest group with the criterion of informality. This parameter creates, from interest group, actors who do not have ambitions to join the institutional state

structures that form public policies and influence their implementation (Bayers et al., 2008).

Political power can be threatened by the fragmentation of interest groups. Fragmented groups are weak partners in political life, their disadvantage being that they compete with each other and are unable to connect, even if their goal is the same. Interest groups should be united by common issues (Schubert, 1989). Interest group activities largely focus on influencing policy outcomes, trying to force issues onto or further up the political agenda, and framing the underlying dimensions that define policy issues. Differences among interest groups can be considerable; some groups are consulted by policymakers and under certain circumstances they may formally take part in some government activities or be legitimised by some sort of subsidiary principle. Interest groups refer to the fact that individuals, organisations, or institutions are associated in a body that design strategies and tactics aimed at influencing public policy.

Political power depends on the formal and informal power within the organisation. Organisation theories explore both formal (normative, prescribed) and informal (subjective, human-oriented) aspects of power (Clegg, 1989; Scott, 2001). Formal power or normative power comes from the constitution, especially the basic human rights that grant freedom of association and participation in the political process. Informal power is usually derived from the active officials that engage in policymaking.

2.2. Criteria of interest groups dispositional political power

Using the theoretical framework of Krott (2005, 73–99) on organisation of interest, we identified factors of dispositional political power or political potential for FOAs. We distinguish between formal, informal, internal, and external factors (Fig. 1). Formal factors are primarily based on legislation, for example, the basic human rights guaranteed by the constitution or obligatory membership enforced by law. Informal factors represent the ability of interest groups to participate in the political process in an informal way. Internal factors represent the ability or potential of interest groups to operate within the political process, and

external factors represent the relations with other associations, government, other NGOs, etc. As Table 1 shows, there is no strict distinction between the factors. Based on country specific conditions the distinction of factors can overlap (e.g. in countries where lobbying is enacted by law, it is a formal factor, and where it is not institutionalised informal).

2.2.1. Factors of internal formal dispositional power

Internal formal political power is derived from formal rules and regulations approved by the members using democratic principles.

2.2.1.1. Internal rules and democratic agenda setting. Internal rules of an association determine how the association will function and what goals it should achieve. These rules are enacted in associations' statutes which present the basic document containing rules of conduct for association members. Statutes are approved by the general assembly, and in that way members can influence associations' activities. The rules apply to all members, including committees and executive bodies. In associations the decision is usually made following the majority principle. 'Majority rule', though, can produce results that the minority does not support. Following the principle of democratic structure, the membership in association assumes agreement with the programme as a whole (Krott, 2005, 77). Respecting minority opinion is one of the safeguards against a larger body of uninformed opinion and ensures that the minority does not feel 'tyrannized' by the majority (Dahl, 1961).

2.2.1.2. Financial resources for associations' actions. The acquisition and sustainability of various financial resources are a paramount challenge for organisations (Reed, 1999). Associations can obtain financial resources from either internal or external sources. Internal sources are membership fees and income from one's own business activities. External sources can be various incentives, grants, donations from an individual person, sponsorships, public collections, or public subsidies etc. (Majdúchová, 2004). External sources can provide a significant income but can make the association dependent on other actors (Oliver, 1991) which can have an impact on the association's power potential. For that reason associations must seek to diversify their financial resources.

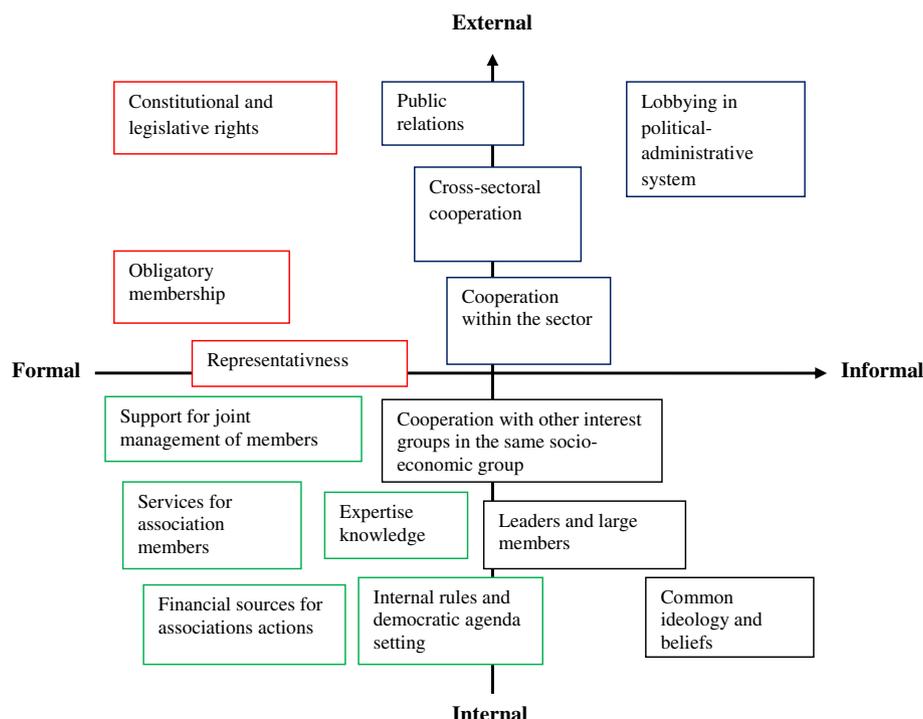


Fig. 1. Factors of dispositional political power.

Table 1
Date of interview with officials in their associations.

Officials	Association	Date of interview
O1	Association of Owners of Private Community and Municipal Forests of Banská Bystrica Region	4 October 2013
O2	Association of Municipal Forest	7 October 2013
O3	Association of Municipal Forest	9 October 2013
O4	Union of Diocese Forests	11 October 2013
O5	Gemerské Regional Associations of Non-state Forest Owners	12 October 2013
O6	Šarišsko-Zemplínske Association of Forest Owners	14 October 2013
O7	Liptovsko-Tatranské Regional Association of Forest Owners	14 October 2013
O8	Slovak Community of Commons and other Communities Žilina	16 October 2013
O9	Turčianske Regional Association of Forest Owners	18 October 2013
O10	Association of Non-state Forests Kysucké Nové Mesto	21 October 2013
O11	Association of Non-state Forest Owners Trenčín	22 October 2013
O12	Regional Associations of Non-state Forest Owners Spiš	25 October 2013
O13	Association of Non-state Forest Owners Orava	27 October 2013

2.2.1.3. Services for association members. It is widely agreed that the main function of interest groups is to provide the interests and needs of individuals with mutual support, without waiting for the decision of any state agency, and to provide alternative solutions (freedom of choice) for individuals. The services for members include awareness and education, where the service is aimed at individual members of the group, because the information, which is difficult to find, is collected, treated, and distributed through the group. Associations should organise training and education to address the issues for which the group was established. Members could jointly participate in pursuing interests that have been established and so avoid the free rider problem (FAO, 2000).

2.2.1.4. Support for joint forest management of members. Group activities to take advantage of economies of scale can be a major purpose of associations. Economies of scale can be found in input management, supply, production, marketing, and cost management. Bulk purchase by an organisation on behalf of members can mean lower prices for equipment and materials. Another economic purpose of associations is cooperation in wood production and management. Joint management activities can be more efficient and simpler for the individual member. In forestry, with small ownership units and management, activities which cross property boundaries are also often necessary. For forest owners not living on the property, joint management with most activities being carried out by others often represents the only management option. Joint marketing in general gives a stronger market position, with consequent higher revenues. Association purposes may also consist of combinations of interest representation, information tasks, or economic objectives (FAO, 2000). Associations that support joint forest management could potentially attract more members and become more powerful, although their primary focus is business cooperation, not political representation (FAO, 2012).

2.2.1.5. Expert knowledge. On the basis of expert knowledge, members of associations can influence other actors. By proposing substantive solutions and expert activity in specific areas, information deficits on the part of the public administration and politicians are decreasing. In interest groups the concept of 'power of expertise', which means the ability to influence the behaviour of others in a group on the basis of past experience and expertise in the specific area, is an important factor and is a sign of better cooperation in achieving common interests (Huber, 2000).

2.2.2. Factors of internal informal dispositional power

2.2.2.1. Representativeness. Representativeness is expressed by the number of association members to the number of all members from one socioeconomic group. In pluralism, the greater the relative size of the association (in terms of members) working in the field, the smaller the number of members outside the organisation. In corporatism, some associations have obligatory membership so the representativeness is nearly 100%. In this manner the organisation increases its representation in the sector and so its acceptance and power. According to rational choice theory, for a single actor it is not rational to partake in time-consuming meetings, negotiations, or lobbying activities, when he will benefit from the improved outcomes anyway. This situation represents a 'common goods' or 'free rider' problem as described by Olson (1965). To overcome this situation incentives or restriction of benefits to members can get a single actor to partake or join such an organisation.

2.2.2.2. Leaders and large members. Accomplishing goals that positively impact the group requires effective leadership linked to strong power bases and workable influence strategies (Michelson, 2001). The leader is able to influence others and modify their behaviour. The leader is a formal, but often also informal, authority in the group, with the right to influence others and to ask others to do things that are considered within the scope of his or her authority (Lunenburg, 2012).

A large membership is essential for associations. In accordance with the theory of critical mass, the decisive factor for the formation of the interest group is not its size, but the existence of big contributors, who have a strong interest in the proper functioning of the association as this will lead to a better achievement of their interests and goals (Marwell and Oliver, 1993).

2.2.2.3. Common ideology and beliefs. Ideologies are very important for associations because they hold together and justify the behaviour of individual members (Krott, 2005). If potential members can identify with the group's ideology or interests, that might increase their willingness to join the association and support its agenda setting. Interest groups that have the ability to tap into ideologies have the ability to acquire supporters who do not share the particular interests of their members. These supporters could improve the interest groups' chances of obtaining their political objectives. However, interest groups also pursue the interests of their members. They cannot gain the support of the general public without some recourse to ideology. Ideology either persuades the general public to support the group or to be indifferent to the group's policy preferences. Ideology may appeal either to individuals' own values or to their own economic interests. Interest groups may even use ideology to shape the economic interests of individuals. This can give groups an advantage beyond the strength of interests or ideology (Marrison, 2002).

2.2.2.4. Cooperation of associations in the same socioeconomic group. Interest groups do not always have to wait for the intervention of governmental institutions. They can participate in achieving their interests together with other groups that promote the same interests. Exchange of opinions and information might result in communication and possibly bring about a resolution of problem issues (Greenwood, 2003). The ability to obtain allies in other groups is related to the organisation of interests, by which more associations acting together can effectively achieve common interests such as cooperation within the political-administrative system. Associations cooperate together and can engage in coalitions because they see them as an effective tool with which to influence public policy (Schlozman and Tierney, 1986; Hula, 1999; Heaney, 2006). Within one socio-economic group (e.g. forestry) several interest groups can exist. If the associations from the same socio-economic group are able to cooperate, their political potential increases. There are also actors that can profit from non-cooperation. Even if the

sector becomes unable to be profitable for the specific interests of all the actors involved, some groups within the sector might gain profits due to the internal distribution. Change of the sector or cross-sectoral relations endanger the balance of power and are therefore risky for the winners within the sector (Krott, 2005).

2.2.2.5. Cooperation within the sector. The forestry sector is known for its rather introverted policy style with only a few possibilities for actors stemming outside the sector to be able to influence decision-making (Hogl and Kvarda, 2008). Within the forest sector actors share common knowledge, values, and beliefs, and have permanent lines of communication and negotiate compromise through mutual accommodation (Pregernig and Weiss, 1998). Usually closed networks in the established forestry sector exist which increases the political potential (Sarvašová et al., 2014). In contrast, an unwillingness to cooperate can refer to the political potential from other sources, meaning that powerful actors in the sector do not want to cooperate because it might change the balance of power in the sector (Krott, 2005).

2.2.3. Factors of external formal dispositional power

2.2.3.1. Constitutional and legislative rights. Political pluralism is fundamental to political systems of democratic states. The essence of this term is free competition of groups in exerting influence upon the decisions taken by the state. Political pluralism is thus a constitutive feature of a democratic regime, and it is manifested in freedom of association and the expression of opinion (Lipset, 1995). The free articulation of interests strengthens the democratic legitimacy of political decisions (Rudzio, 1996, 66); therefore, interest groups should be able to influence the political process by commenting on legislative proposals or strategic documents. This can strengthen their place in the political process and also enable them to achieve several of their objectives.

2.2.3.2. Obligatory membership. Corporatism can be understood as an interest group system that is highly institutionalised and integrated into the formal political process (Lijphart, 2012, 158–9). Hence corporatist literature emphasises the need for monopolistic associations and compulsory or semi-compulsory membership (Offe, 1981; Panitch, 1979). Associations act as self-governing bodies on their own behalf and as intermediaries between the government and their members (Czada, 2011). The state delegates its competencies to the corporate associations (e.g. chambers) which can increase their power.

2.2.4. Factors of external informal dispositional power

2.2.4.1. Lobbying in political-administrative system. Interest groups use lobbying as a tactic to promote the interests of its members. The political activities of many associations are not limited to lobbying on specific issues, but include diffuse practices such as attending workshops, receptions, press conferences, and monitoring newspaper and other media stories. Associations monitor the policy process to generate information for their clients and constituencies. Associations are motivated to provide information related to the formulation and implementation of public policies if they can influence the outcome in their favour (Austen-Smith and Wright, 1992). For associations the advantage is to have their representative in government because they can better

reach and serve their interests (Krott, 2005). Lobbying can be formal (regulated by law) or informal (depending on the associations' leaders and their personal abilities); therefore, the distinction between formal or informal power criteria cannot be drawn clearly (Fig. 1).

2.2.4.2. Public relations. Public relations (PR) work is the planned effort to establish trust and gain the understanding of the general public. Public opinion is important to associations. Members of a group should be able to use various PR tool (events, media, information boards, information services) in practice to gain public awareness and to play an important role in influencing the political process (Krott, 2005). PR activities aim to reach various target groups. Orientation to target groups is a prerequisite for effective and efficient PR work (Krott, 2005). The target groups that share the same ideology or beliefs as the association are then easier to reach in order to achieve the PR objectives.

2.2.4.3. Cross-sectoral coordination. Cross-sectoral coordination between various sectors and their policies aims to ensure that different sectoral actors (both private and state) which are jointly responsible for ensuring political programmes and public policy measures do not act redundantly or do not create gaps in public services (Peters, 1998). When associations are able to cooperate with other actors in their interest they can increase their power potential. In forestry, as research shows (Giessen and Krott, 2009; Giessen, 2010), the forestry sector often resists integration attempts from other sectors. Cross-sectorality means new solutions threatening the established sectoral ones and new groups threatening the balance of power organised in the sector. Therefore, cross-sectorality basically presents a threat to a sector and it is not surprising that the sector and its stakeholders informally resist, even in case that they formally welcome in principle the need of cross-sectoral problem solving (Krott, 2005).

3. Material and methods

In order to assess the political potential of FOAs in Slovakia we proposed several factors of their political power (Fig. 1). Based on theoretical and empirical knowledge, we define the political power of interest groups as the ability to succeed in the political process.

The methodological approach is based on triangulation of methods, which means the mutual results validation of individual methodological steps by identifying relevant political science theories (power theory, sectoral approach), proving their formal elements using primary and secondary document analysis, and proving their informal elements using interviews with actors, because this method will help to eliminate the disadvantages of single methods (Denzin, 1978).

The methods were selected in order to analyse the views of FOA officials on factors of political power introduced by the research team. At first we analysed primary and secondary documents as legislation, strategic documents, web pages of FOAs, annual reports, etc.

Secondly, we identified all FOAs in Slovakia (Fig. 1) and their current and former officials (president or executive secretary). We could identify 20 respondents. In the end 13 agreed to participate in the research (Table 2). We used a semi-structured questionnaire containing questions about the basic role of FOAs as they can be found in the scientific literature (Krott, 2005; Glück et al., 2010; FAO, 2012). The questions were derived from the theory (see Chapter 2) and proposed by a group

Table 2
Ownership structure of forests as of 31 December 2012.

Ownership category	State	Non-state					Non-state together	Unknown owners	
		Private	Community	Church	Agri coop	Municipal			
Forest land	ha	785,851	220,061	448,752	51,259	5549	180,359	905,980	248,469
	%	40.5%	11.3%	23.1%	2.6%	0.3%	9.3%	46.7%	12.8%

Source: Report on the status of Slovak forestry, 2013.

of experts (University, Research Institute). The questions were first presented at a conference held at the National Forestry Centre in Slovakia where forestry actors (researchers, FOA officials, state administration) could comment on them. Afterwards they were revised and reformulated by the research team. The interviews were transcribed and the statements were assigned to the proposed political power factors.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Establishment of FOAs in Slovakia

In 1991, after the fall of the communist regime, the process of restitution started when the so-called Restitution Law came into force, which allowed the return and use of property to former landowners. The monopoly of state organisations in forestry was rescinded or cancelled and the non-state sector was restored (Moravčík et al., 2009). The restitution of forest property to former owners is still in progress, and is characterised by a diversification in forest management. It is a complicated process, further hampered by the fact that it is not always easy to trace former owners (as a result of earlier migrations)—thus some forests remain unclaimed (Sarvašová and Šiška, 2010).

Slovakia's forest ownership structure is a result of historical and political development. Ownership categories are classified as state, non-state, and unknown ownership. According to the official classification, the non-state ownership category includes forests under private, community, church, agricultural cooperatives, and municipal ownership, contrary to other countries which distinguish between public and private forests (FAO, 2012). The current structure of forest ownership (Table 2) is based on the Register of Forest Owners and Tenures.

In the year 2012, state subjects owned 40.5% of forest land. Non-state forest owners who have legally settled their ownership rights own 46.7% of forest area. The most common legal and organisational forms of non-state forest include: land associations (with or without the status of corporate entities); limited companies; shared companies; individual persons with or without a business licence; and administrative units (commercial, semi-budgetary) attached to municipalities.

The process of forest ownership and rights restitution is still open and thus more changes are due. The largest area of unresolved forests is in private hands. The majority of these forests are of a very limited size, of individual or shared ownership, and impossible to identify in the field (Hajdúchová and Šulek, 2011). In addition, there is a group of forest owners who still has not applied for their ownership rights.

Forest owners' associations have played a significant role in shaping the non-state forestry sector in Slovakia after 1989. Many FOAs were established in response to common problems arising from forest restitution based on previous ownership.

The first association of non-state forest owners, called the *Association of Private, Associated and Communal Forests*, was set up in 1991. Its ambition was to cover the whole non-state forest sector in Slovakia with smaller regional units, but it did not succeed (Konôpka et al., 1999). Only some regional associations of forest owners were created, starting in 1996.

After that first attempt, a new organisation appeared in 1996, called the *Union of Regional Associations of Non-state Forests*, which now represents 10 regional associations. This union is considered a social partner by the Ministry of Agriculture, having the right to participate in the forest policymaking process.

Other important regional associations of non-state forests were set up during the 90s, such as the *Association of Owners of Private Forests and Forests in Shared Ownership in Banská Bystrica County* (1991), the *Association of Municipal Forests in Slovakia* (1994), and the *Union of Diocesan Forests in Slovakia* (1998). The *Association of Owners of Private Forests and Forests in Shared Ownership in Banská Bystrica County* is a comprehensive forum whose members are not only individual forest owners and communities with forests in shared ownership, but also

businessmen working in the forest sector and persons with a forestry education background providing training for this association (Fig. 2).

The *Council of Non-state FOAs* is a formal association of four FOAs. Their main tasks and objectives lay in forest policy issues, namely to coordinate the procedures in advocating for the interests of non-state forest owners in forest policy towards various actors. The Council consists of the four FOA chairmen; one of them is the head of the Council and represents the association towards other actors. There is a six-month rotating presidency. To address specific professional problems expert committees are created. The financing sources stem from membership fees paid by each FOA in the sum of 200 Euros per year.

The *Union of Regional Associations of Non-state Forests* consists of 10 regional associations. The managed area is 276,200 ha. The main aims do not lie in forest policy targets; they focus more on restitution matters and services for their members. The executive body is the presidency which consists of the chairmen of the regional member associations (10 members). The statutory is the president who is during his absence represented by the vice president. Control activities are performed by the supervisory board (three members). Officials are not paid for their work; they do so on voluntary basis. Financial resources are provided by membership fees and the 2% from taxes paid by natural and legal persons. The annual budget is around 2500–3300 Euros. The articulation of interests is difficult due to various members. Although the regional FOAs are grouped into the Union, they are not always united in their opinion. This can result in leaving the Union as it was the case recently of the Gemer FOA which left the Union last year (05).

The *Association of Municipal Forests in Slovakia* brings together 60 subjects with an area of forest land 146,125 ha. Members of the association are municipalities owning forests or legal entities established by them for forest management. The main aims and objectives are forest policy issues and services for members. Some of the members jointly manage their forests through the enterprise *ZOLKA Ltd*. The supreme body of the association is the general assembly. The executive body is a five-member executive committee, which generally meets four times a year. The statutory representative is the president. To ensure organisational, administrative, financial, and professional activities a secretariat was established which is managed by the secretary general.

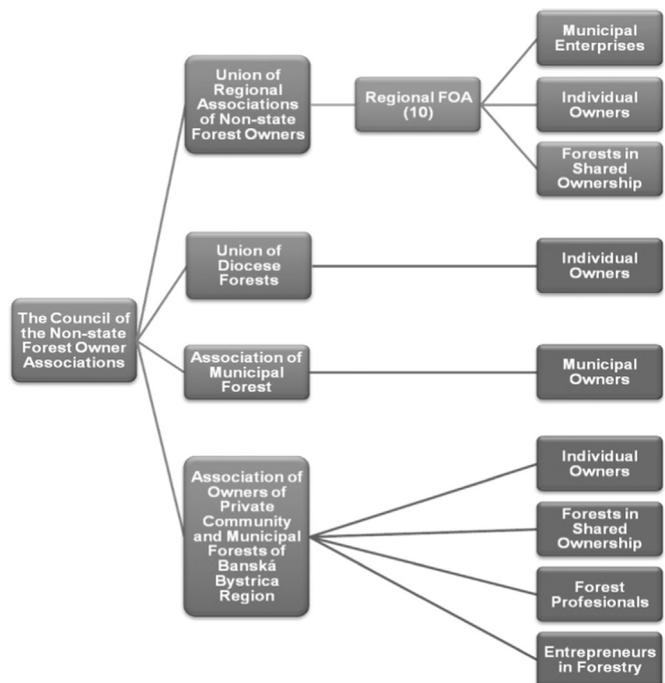


Fig. 2. Structure of FOAs in Slovakia.

Control activity is conducted by the supervisory board (three members). Officials work voluntarily; only the function of the secretary general is paid. The budget of the association is secured by membership fees, sponsorship, and donations; its height is around 30 thousand Euros per year.

The *Union of Diocesan Forests in Slovakia* consists of legal entities or religious bodies managing the forests of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. The Union has 13 members who are managers or tenants of church forest property. Jointly they manage about 40,000 ha of forests. The members do not pay any membership fees. The main aims are assisting members or other religious entities with the return of their property in restitution process and other services. Recently, however, the activity is declining due to the sale of church property. Currently only its largest member is actively engaged—the company Pro Populo Poprad, Ltd., which manages forest and agricultural land owned by the Roman Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Diocese of Spiš. Activities are steered by the council which decides all major issues. The council consists of member entities, representatives engaged in asset management. The statutory authority is the president of the council. The executive body is the chancellor. President and chancellor are elected for a term of two years. Activities within the Union are voluntary; they have no paid officers.

The *Association of Owners of Private Forests and Forests in Shared Ownership in Banská Bystrica County* operates in 13 districts of the Banská Bystrica region and currently has 534 members with a total area of managed forests 134,011 ha. The main aims are providing services for its members, especially advisory services. The supreme body is the general assembly. The executive body is the board of directors which has 15 members, including the president, two vice presidents, and a secretary. Control activities are provided the supervisory board (three members), which meets twice a year. Three officers are paid: president, secretary, and treasurer. Sources of financing are membership fees (derived from forest area – 0.25 €/ha per year) and donations.

4.2. Analysis of the FOAs political power

4.2.1. Internal formal dispositional political power

4.2.1.1. Internal rules and democratic agenda setting. Formal democratic principles are ensured. Internal rules are defined in statutes of the FOAs which regulate their internal affairs and set rules for the code of conduct for members and FOA officials. Our results did not show any exclusion of minority groups, but there were struggles in setting the policy agenda issues (O5, O9) due to the change in FOA main activities. After the fall of communism, the main goal of FOAs was assisting members and non-members in the restitution process. Nowadays, new tasks have arisen such as interest representation and advisory services for members in economic and forestry issues. In the regional FOAs mainly legal advice regarding legislative changes is provided (O1).

Although the membership in association assumes agreement with the programme as a whole (O4), the interests of individual members can be diverse. Therefore internal rules are important to ensure the dialogue between the elected executive bodies and members to secure internal stability. Different interests of individual members in FOAs provide an opportunity to gain a new perspective on an issue (O5), but can also lead to internal conflicts. As all officials stated, arbitrary committees envisaged by the statutes for conflict resolution were never convened, nor did they execute any activity. This indicates that members were able to solve their conflicts on their own using democratic principles anchored in the statutes. According to our findings there is an overall consensus that interests are the same, but the means of achieving the goals are different.

Not all forestry issues can be successfully placed on the political agenda. The limits lie in the common agreement of FOAs' members—the final position has to reflect the common interest of its members. As one official stated, 'different interests arise from the lack of knowledge and

communication, because everyone is interested foremost in the economic aspects for themselves' (O1).

According our theory the group that successfully describes an agenda will also be the one that defines the solutions to it, thereby prevailing in policy debate. For example, in the *Act on Forests no. 326/2005* formulation process, FOA representatives proposed a change of the period for securing young forest stands. They claimed that the number proposed by the Ministry (seven years) did not reflect natural conditions. In the end their proposal was accepted and the proposed period of 10 years as they suggested was incorporated in the new law (O1–12). We can conclude that this factor increases the disposable power of FOAs.

4.2.1.2. Financial resources for associations' actions. The main problem for associations is to find financial resources for their activities, the lack of which might hinder the fulfilment and achievement of set goals. All of the interviewees agreed that FOAs in Slovakia do not have enough financial resources, which is reflected in the provided services for members and their activities. Funding of associations in Slovakia is, according to the majority of the officials, a long-lasting problem. State support has been critical in recent years, and they feel that the state does not make any effort to help them (O1–13). In order to be able to carry out activities, obtaining funds from multiple sources is vital (O1–13).

FOAs receive major funding from membership fees, which members have to pay annually according to property size. There are members that do not pay the fees, but still benefit from the outputs (O1, O5–12).

FOAs have several options of additional income in order to secure their own financial independence from a single source and to avoid the negative consequences from an unexpected failure. In particular, there is the opportunity to obtain support from the Rural Development Programme (RDP) and government grants. Support via RDP for forest owners is one of the most important ways to get financial resources (O1–13). Through EU funding associations can provide better services for their members and motivate non-members to join the association.

At the outset, some FOAs received government grants for purchasing office equipment, and project support was also available through European programmes such as PHARE. Apart from the *Association of Private, Associated and Communal Forests*, which received support from the Ministry of Agriculture for its establishment in 1991, FOAs have not had any significant direct support from the government. Most of the support available comes through informal expertise exchange with other countries and international organisations.

FOAs do not fear dependence on the state, because they only ask for some contribution for operational activities, as is the case in other associations (e.g. church). The money would not be spent on the officials' salaries, but for the better provision of services for members (O1, O5, O8, O13).

4.2.1.3. Services for association members. As has already been mentioned, in the past, FOAs were established in response to common problems arising from forest restitution based on previous ownership rights. As some officials stated, these problems were time-consuming, expensive, and the FOAs could not interfere directly; the owners had to solve them on their own. FOAs could only assist in the administrative procedure (O4–7, O9).

Nowadays the main services provided for members are legal and economic advice. The quality and nature of provided service depend on the financial situation of the association and is not very high. Usually the FOA executive bodies invite state administration officials or economic experts to explain changes in legislation regarding land associations and tax reforms. Trainings or seminars are organised ad hoc unsystematically because of the lack of human and financial resources (O1, O5, O6, O11, O12). In the past, FOAs could get public funding under the *Act no. 274/2006* of the Coll. on the support of agriculture and rural development for advisory services, education, and the establishment and operation of regional FOAs. This support has been cancelled and the only support FOAs can get from the state is for PR

activities. The main complaint of the officials is that the state does not support associations; it has even stopped funding advisory services for members (O3, O8).

4.2.1.4. Support for joint forest management of members. The concept of joint forest management does not exist in Slovak forest policy as a systematic concept, nor does a political programme exist. In Slovakia there were several regulatory instruments supporting the creation of joint forest management associations (JFMA). Most of them remained only declaratory, referring to follow-up implementing legislation which was not enacted. Only one of them (*Ministry Regulation no. 806/2004*) stated specific financial instruments for association support in the form of direct hectare payments depending on the size of associated forest property, but none of the FOAs claimed state support for associating. As a consequence, management on common lands is undertaken individually and a common concept is not created (O8–10). One official feels that the need for joint management is important for the next generations and to ensure income for the coming years (O3). One of the advantages of joint management is the prevention of illegal activities in forests. This is also conducted on an individual basis. According to some officials, the joint effort of the members should be stronger, but associations don't have the money for that (O5, O6). Associating for joint management meets the opposition of individual members despite economic advantages presented in the theory (Glück et al., 2011).

4.2.1.5. Expertise knowledge. By employing their expertise FOAs can have a considerable hand in formulating political programmes and enforcing them. In Slovakia, officials do not perceive the strong professional expertise of FOAs as an asset because the state administration does not utilise it (O3, O5–8). Usually FOA officials have forestry expertise, but many individual members lack any kind of forestry background or knowledge. The officials are capable of communicating the knowledge to their members and towards other associations, but they feel that the state does not want their expertise (O1, O7–13). They all agreed that it is in the interest of the state to educate new forest owners, since only forest owners with specific knowledge of forestry are able to manage the forests efficiently and in accordance with sustainable forest management principles. The reason why the state administration does not need the expertise of FOAs is that in the forest sector, state forest administration also has available extensive practical information, particularly from its experience in managing public forests, advisory and extension services, and the silvicultural experimental and planning stations. State forest authorities have information on forests also from forest management plans (which are obligatory in Slovakia regardless of forest ownership), from forest management records, as well as economic information which they update annually, so they do not need expertise from FOAs.

4.2.2. Internal informal dispositional political power

4.2.2.1. Representativeness. Due to different ownership categories the representativeness of FOAs is also diverse. The highest representativeness in terms of members has the UDF (100%), where all entities owning or managing church forests are members but together they manage only 79% of the forest area. UMF manages 75% of all municipal forests, having 19.7% representation (60 members from 305 municipalities owning forests). Although the representation is high, church forests present only 2.6% and municipal forests 9% of the total forest cover. The situation in regional FOAs is different. Table 3 presents the results for following regions: Banská Bystrica, Gemer, Liptov–Tatry, Šariš, Trenčín, and Žilina. According to their internal evidence they have 509 members. The total area of forest land in the six analysed regions reaches 1,316,807 ha, of which 596,031 ha (45.3%) is the area managed by non-state owners. Based on the structure of forests managed by non-state entities, we calculated the current representativeness and potential members in the regions (Table 3). The highest representation has

Table 3
Representativeness and potential members of selected regional FOAs (Hricová et al., 2015, 49).

Region	Representativeness (%)	Potential members ^a (%)	
		Total	Municipal and church forests excluded
Banská Bystrica	24.4	75.6	41.9
Gemer	30.2	69.8	41.6
Liptov–Tatry	44.7	55.3	36.7
Šariš	7.7	92.3	86.9
Trenčín	21.7	78.3	69.5
Žilina	24.1	75.9	74.5

^a Potential members present the whole socio-economic group or all non-state forest owners

Liptovsko-tatranská FOA, the lowest-Šariš Zemplín FOA. If we subtract the group of entities managing forests that potentially may also be members of other associations on ownership basis (municipal, church), there still remains a high proportion of forest owners who do not belong to any of the regional associations of non-state forests. This creates an opportunity for the work of regional organisations in attracting new members, which is also recognised by FOAs officials. The officials of regional FOAs don't like to formally refer about the representativeness of their FOAs because of the loss of their dispositional power (O1, O6–11). The small representativeness of FOAs is a limiting factor because of the lack of financial resources for necessary apparatus (O8). Representativeness is small because of the diversity of opinion (O9–13).

4.2.2.2. Leaders and large members. Forest owners' associations in Slovakia are predominantly managed by older people who are doing their jobs on a voluntary basis without any financial benefit, but according to their best abilities and skills (O1–2, O5–7). Professionalisation is important, but in FOAs where the officials are not paid high operability is lacking contrary to those who are employed by the FOA (e.g. *Union of Municipal Forests, Union of Diocese Forests*). The activity of FOA officials is proportional to their success in the political process and when they are not taken into account, they can easily lose the motivation to initiate new agenda issues (O1).

The structure of FOAs in Slovakia consists of different members. Some of them are small-scale forest owners owning less than one hectare of forest land, but also large members owning more than a thousand hectares. Large members are important for FOAs as they hold the group together which is also supported by our results. Mainly in *Union of Municipal Forests, Union of Diocese Forests*, and *FOA of Banská Bystrica* region large members are important for the whole functioning of the FOA (O1–4). Often the FOAs officials stem from the large members.

4.2.2.3. Common ideology and beliefs. There is a long history of common ideology, but due to the previous period of collective ownership, it has been restored only recently after 1989. The most important beliefs are sustainable timber production while maintaining the basic principles of forestry and secure income from forestry in the form of property income and labour. The value orientation is based on anthropocentrism, the principles of market economy, security of property rights, sustained timber production, theory of the wood production hinge, and particular professional forestry (O1–12). The key players in this group are FOAs, state forestry, forestry science, research, and education. There are differences between small forest owners who tend to prefer the beliefs linked to ownership, contrary to officials who favour forest functions and the professionalism of forestry which is even more visible by paid officials (O1–4). Groups oriented toward social interests are more reserved in formulating their values and political positions as economic groups. This is particularly true for the whole forestry coalition. This is given by the fact that interest groups are united around a common interest (forest owners) and have in mind especially their primary interest, in this case to ensure respect for their rights to own forest land.

4.2.2.4. Cooperation with other interest groups in the same socio-economic group. The cooperation mechanisms for FOA are established under the umbrella organisation: the *Council of Non-state Forest Owners Associations (Council)*. The Council operates formally, but closer cooperation is failing due to different interests of individual FOAs. The large members of the council have forest policy issues as their main objectives contrary to regional FOAs where restitution issues are still resonant and their main activities are focused on member training and advice. FOA officials see the main obstacle for FOA cooperation in Slovakia in their lack of unity; everybody wants to manage their regional FOA alone, not in a council (O1–4, O7, O10). The struggles between officials were observed (O3, O5, O7). Some examples of cooperation in council include sharing information and advocating for common interests (O2, O5). However, there is only little evidence of real integrated interests, and no example of equipment sharing or financial cooperation (O1–13). FOAs are engaged in some kind of cooperation e.g. lobbying/political awareness, group certification, information/educational opportunities, and shared knowledge/assistance/experience, etc. When disagreement cannot be overcome, the members of regional FOAs withdraw from the Union, as it was the case of the Gemer FOAs (O5).

4.2.2.5. Cooperation within the sector. Cooperation between actors in the forestry sector is improving. The restitution process is almost finished and the actors are now trying to find common interests. Associations cooperate with the Forests of the Slovak Republic, state enterprise in reprivatisation issues because the state enterprise has competence delegated by the state to return forest property to former owners (O1–13). Another field of cooperation with the state enterprise is in the timber trade. There is an overall agreement that state forests dictate the price of wood. There is a big disagreement about the conducted trade policy, and officials feel that there is fraud and bribery when selling wood (O1–13) from the state enterprise. The cooperation with the National Forest Centre and Technical University is mainly aimed at exchange of information or collaboration in research activities. The main problem as perceived by all officials lies in the cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture. There is an overall agreement among FOA representatives that the state bureaucracy (in our case the Ministry of Agriculture) has no interest in non-state forests. They are formally recognised as a partner, but have very little impact on policy outputs. FOAs are invited to the creation of strategic documents, not taken into account in individual decisions, there exists no support from the Ministry, and their opinions are not accepted (O2–9). There are formal and informal forums where forestry actors can meet and exchange information. The formal one is the *Minister's Council for Forestry and Wood Processing Industry*. It is an advisory body to the Minister of Agriculture who also appoints its members. Two of them are FOA representatives (*Union of Municipal Forests, Council*). The main task is to elaborate position papers on current forest policy issues. Informally forestry actors meet at various seminars and events. Other research shows that there are signs of inter-sectoral cooperation, mainly in the formulation process of strategic documents (Dobšínská et al., 2013), and especially in rural development policy where the forestry actors' network was active in formulating forestry measures supported by the programme (Dobšínská et al., 2013).

4.2.3. External formal dispositional political power

4.2.3.1. Constitutional and legislative rights. The basic constitutional right to associate is guaranteed. Association and representation of common interests is the only option where associations can achieve more with joint power (O1–13). The existence of the *Council of the Non-state Forest Owner Associations* provides the requirements for better non-state forest owners' interest representation.

In Slovakia a formal coordination mechanism exists, where the public can influence political decision-making through the comment process. It is called the intergovernmental commenting process. Comments

take the form of a proposal or recommendation and the submitter may or may not take them into account (Kováčechová and Žilincík, 1999). Associations also have the right to comment on the legislation using the so called 'mass comment', which means that a larger number of natural and legal persons from the public signs a certain comment. The public appoints a representative that communicates with the ministry and tries to eliminate differences. These instruments are often used by FOAs in Slovakia. They usually comment on the legislation and strategic documents formulation.

4.2.3.2. Obligatory membership. Obligatory membership can make FOAs larger and stronger and it can increase their political influence and promote their interests. It could stimulate passive forest owners to manage their forests. In Slovakia, obligatory membership in forest owners associations does not exist. Associating follows the pluralist principle. Forest owners associations are voluntary, so there is no compulsion to join other than the motivation to act. The fragmentation of non-state forest ownership with little interest in joining the association of forest owners is a limiting factor for their political power (O2–13). The majority of interviewed FOAs officials are not in favour of obligatory membership even though it would increase their political potential substantially (O2–13).

4.2.4. External informal dispositional political power

4.2.4.1. Lobbying in political-administrative system. In Slovakia there are no legislative rules for professional lobbying as an activity aimed at influencing decision-making processes. There are only indirect regulations relating to the prohibition of malpractices affecting the decision-making processes (e.g. conflict of interest, public procurement, right to obtain information, etc.). Lobbying is undertaken on an informal basis through personal contact with state officials or at various events. FOA lobbying activities depend on their human and financial resources and are therefore limited (O1–6, O8). Lobbying is mainly done at the national level, rarely on regional or local one. International lobbying does not take place; Slovak FOAs try to pursue their interests through European forest owners associations (O2, O4–5).

FOAs usually use soft lobbying forms such as personal meetings, letters, membership in committees, education, etc. At present there is an overall agreement among FOA representatives that these soft forms are insufficient and that they need to employ tougher tactics such as demonstrations or blockades (O2–13).

4.2.4.2. Public relations. In forestry, public relations through media, promotional materials, and various events help to create a positive attitude of the population towards the forests, foresters and FOAs. FOAs have limited financial resources therefore PR activities are rare and often not perceived as important. In enforcing their interests, associations must use the mutual cooperation of strong forestry actors and a common strategy with the public (O1–13). FOAs have to be active in promoting the creation of a joint strategy for the whole forestry sector including other sectoral actors (O1–4, O8). In FOAs public relations are more local and informal using the activities of officials and members (O1–4, O8).

4.2.4.3. Cross-sectoral coordination. There are some signs of cross-sectoral coordination, but real coordination is absent. International commitments are being taken into account in policy formulation (Dobšínská et al., 2013), but otherwise sectoral interests prevail. Current legislation in the nature conservation sector and forestry sector does not allow cooperation between these sectors, because the Act on Forests and nature conservation law contradict each other (O5, O7–9). These results are confirmed by Sarvašová et al. (2013), who analysed the formulation process of the NATURA 2000 in Slovakia. The overall conclusion was that cross-sectoral coordination was missing because of the different belief systems of both coalitions (owners and environmental).

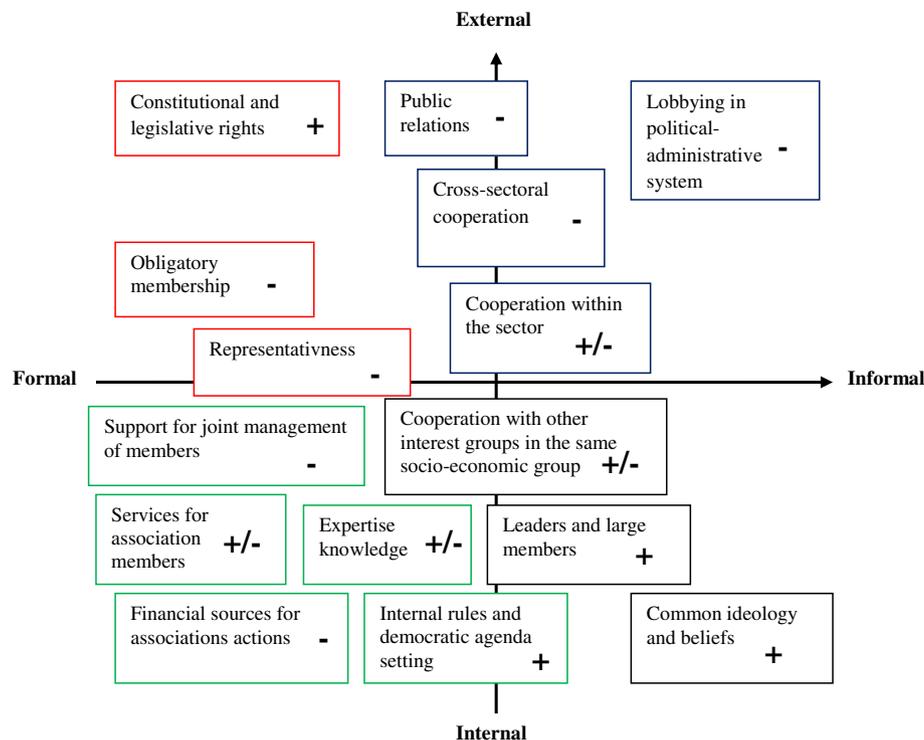


Fig. 3. Factors of dispositional power of FOAs in Slovakia. Legend: + high dispositional power, +/- middle dispositional power and – low dispositional power.

In rural development policy the agricultural sector is very strong and forestry is in the background (Dobšínská et al., 2013). FOAs are dissatisfied with the outcomes because only a certain amount of financial resources was allocated to forestry measures. FOAs can also try to cooperate with the wood processing industry, although it is not that simple (O9) because for wood processors economic interests come first as they try to achieve sustainable wood flow (Parobek and Paluš, 2008; Parobek et al., 2014).

5. Conclusions

Formally, the institutional context in Slovakia where FOAs can operate in order to impact policymaking exists, although at present the dispositional power of FOAs is limited due to various reasons (Fig. 3).

The crucial internal factor which limits the power potential of FOAs is the lack of financial resources for providing services and joint management activities, which might strongly hinder the fulfilment and achievement of set goals in policymaking. Dispositional power of other identified internal factors cannot substitute for the power potential of financial resources. FOAs receive major funding from membership fees which members have to pay annually according to their property size. There are members who do not pay the fees, but still benefit from the outputs. Officials try to find external financial sources despite the danger of becoming politically dependent on the state.

The most important external factor from the officials' perspective is the disinterest of the state bureaucracy towards non-state forests at the sectoral and cross-sectoral level. There is a common agreement between FOA officials that current strategies and tactics in the form of dialogue are inefficient. FOAs need to strengthen their position via lobbying, public relations, knowledge, and expertise and could use demonstrations, rallies, petitions, statements in the media, and participation in public debates to achieve their objectives. In other countries the power of forest owners partly comes from their stable coalition with the forest state bureaucracies (e.g. Giessen and Krott, 2009). In Slovakia, this does not apply. FOAs are considered as a partner in policy formulation, but their actual political power is low, due to the disunity among FOA leaders and ineffective strategies and tactics.

Acknowledgements

This article was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under contract no. APVV-0057-11. We would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

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