



Stakeholders' perceptions of participation in forest policy: A case study from Baden-Württemberg



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ABSTRACT

German forest policy has traditionally been known for expert-based decision-making in which forest management is viewed primarily as a natural science and economics based task. Yet, this approach to forest policy has been challenged increasingly by civil society organizations who demand stronger consideration of non-timber production interests, and more participation of actors from beyond the traditional forest sector. The German federal state of Baden-Württemberg is a forerunner in response to such demands. In recent years, several forest-related policy processes in this state were designed to increase participation of non-governmental civil society groups.

In this paper, we assess how this trend toward (and practice of) more inclusive, participatory decision-making in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy is viewed by forest policy stakeholders, and to what extent it has affected the relationship between actors associated with production and conservation interests. Our data set includes contributions to, first, a stakeholder workshop and, second, an online forum about the Forest Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg (Waldnaturschutzkonzeption Baden-Württemberg). In both processes, stakeholders provided comments on the issue of participation in forest policy. Third, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with forest policy stakeholders.

We found a mix of perceptions and attitudes toward participation among different actor groups, with private forest owners being the most skeptical and nature conservation groups the greatest proponents of increased participation. Among the state forest service staff, perceptions differed greatly; with high-level bureaucrats being more positive than street level personnel. Yet, regardless of these perceptions, the increasing trend toward civil society participation in forest policy is seen as hardly affecting the ideologies and interests of the involved groups. Hence, no substantial mutual policy learning amongst stakeholders, or improvement of the overall relationship amongst actors representing production and conservation interests, is observed. Yet, we conclude the paper by pointing out that it is too early to assess the long-term effects of increased participation in forest policy-making.

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Introduction: exploring participation in forest policy and management

Government publications and parts of the academic literature are abuzz with terms like “community-based forestry”, “collaborative forest management”, and “participation”. Incorporating participatory elements into decision-making processes has become a symbol of (post-)modern governance, not just in the forestry sector (Healey, 1997; Abram and Cowell, 2004). Participation has entered many different policy fields, but it is particularly

prevalent in environmental and natural resource policies (Koontz and Thomas, 2006). The current trend toward greater inclusion of non-state actors in policy-making has its origins in the social and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Dissatisfaction with the social and ecological consequences of growth-driven, top-down, professional expertise-based policies around the globe led to a demand for consideration of alternative policy approaches, local and diverse needs, and alternative types of knowledge. Closely tied to this was a desire for increased citizen or community participation in natural resource management and policies. It was argued to be an essential part of achieving not only more inclusive, but also more sustainable policies that would take into account broad societal demands (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; Koontz, 2006). The issues of participation and sustainable environmental policies have thus co-evolved over time, and remain

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closely linked (Wesselink et al., 2011; van Tatenhove and Leroy, 2003; Newig and Fritsch, 2006).

Although a general popularity of participatory processes in forest policy and management is evident, the concrete meaning of participation differs depending on the context. Much of the participation literature on forest management and policy focusses on developing countries. Development organizations and developing country governments adopted participatory forest management practices early on, India and Nepal being among the most prominent examples (Acharya, 2004; Dolly, 1994). In many developing countries, large areas of forest that are used to sustain the livelihoods of rural communities are under state ownership, and governments are in charge of regulating use of the resource. While centralized government resource management can be effective, it has proven vulnerable to abuse by political and economic elites (White and Martin, 2005; Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Once the enforcement of rules failed due to lack of capacity, ability, or willingness, state-owned forests turned into *de facto* open access resources, thus making them susceptible to unregulated exploitation and degradation (Broomley 1991 in Heltberg, 2002; White and Martin, 2005). Hence, transferring management authority from the state to local level actors is viewed by many as a promising means of overcoming uncontrolled natural resource degradation. Consequently, participation in natural resource management in developing countries is typically discussed in the context of community-based management, implying a certain level of local authority regarding management decisions. It emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized social groups such as indigenous people and the overall democratization of the decision-making process (e.g., through greater accountability of decision makers) (Michener, 1998; White and Martin, 2005). The expected benefits also include more (cost) effective conservation (Somanathan et al., 2009), for instance by including traditional knowledge and practices (White and Martin, 2005). Furthermore, decisions made locally and through participation of the local communities are expected to enjoy greater acceptance, and thus facilitate policy implementation.

Participatory processes have also been incorporated in industrialized countries' natural resource and environmental policy (Heinrichs et al., 2011). Internationally driven initiatives, such as National Forest Programmes, emphasize the need for greater non-state actor participation in forest policy and management processes not only in developing, but also in developed countries (United Nations, 2000; Schanz, 2002; Elsasser, 2002; Glück and Voitleithner, 2003; Howlett and Rayner, 2006; Winkel and Sotirov, 2011; Cantiani, 2012). The European Union, for instance, released several directives which demand public participation in decision-making processes concerning environmental and land use issues. The European Union's Natura 2000 policy (originally a science-based, top-down policy) can also increasingly be mentioned in this regard (Bouwma et al., 2000; Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Bouwma et al., 2010; Borrass, 2014). Finally, individual countries, such as the US (Moseley, 1999; Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000; Leach, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Newig and Fritsch, 2009a), Australia (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000) and Sweden (Stenseke, 2009), to name just a few, have made efforts to create opportunities for participation in natural resource policy decisions (and forest management in particular).

As in developing countries, it is argued in the industrialized world that the participation democratizes decision-making processes, increases acceptance and eases policy implementation, making environmental policy more cost efficient and effective (Bulkeley and Mol, 2003; Newig and Fritsch, 2006). Additionally, a strong emphasis is placed on participation as a tool for reducing or mitigating conflicts among different interests by involving them in the decision-making process (Newig and Fritsch, 2009b). In this context, it is worth noting that participation in forest policy and

management decision-making and implementation in industrialized countries has frequently evolved only in response to major forest policy controversies (Moseley and Winkel, 2013).

Participatory forest policy-making has eventually also reached Germany. Attempts to practice a more participatory approach to forest policy-making are challenging in this country. This is due to the fact that the German model of forestry was for a long time (and still is to a certain degree) characterized by an expert and (forest) science-based approach to decision-making, emphasizing the long-term oriented management of forests with a primary focus on timber production (for a slightly exaggerated description of the technocratic 'German forest model' see Scott, 2008). In line with this approach, German forest policy was for a long time shaped by a relatively small group of actors, the German forest sector. This sector included the German state forest services, professional forestry organizations, and private forest owners, who all viewed timber production as the central purpose of forest management (Weber, 2003; Winkel, 2007b). Yet, since the 1970s and increasingly in the past two decades, the hegemony of the German forest sector has been challenged by a broader range of actors with more diverse interests and perspectives. Most prominently, a new set of conservation oriented actors who first entered the forest policy arena during the 1980s and 1990s must be mentioned in this regard (Weber, 2003; Winkel, 2007b; Winkel and Sotirov, 2011). Made up of both governmental and private environmental organizations, they demanded a greater consideration of social and ecological forest values and, connected to this, opportunities for participation in forest policy decision-making (Weber, 2003; Volz, 1995, 2000). The traditional forest sector and new environmental actors – often referred to as the forestry coalition and the nature conservation coalition (Winkel & Sotirov, 2011) – have been in conflict over forest management policy since the diversification of the policy arena roughly three decades ago. In these controversies, the traditional forest sector actors refuse stricter ecologically oriented legislation and, more generally, resist the increasing influence of non-forest-sector stakeholders in forest policy.

As for Baden-Württemberg, the state forest policymakers had for a long time developed forest policy and management in line with the traditional German approach of expert-based, closed decision-making privileging "regular" forest management (*ordnungsgemäße Forstwirtschaft*) for timber production. This is not to say that ecological values demanded by civil society organizations were not integrated in forest management. There is a long tradition of close-to-nature forestry approaches in Baden-Württemberg, and, already in the 1980s, the forest administration had introduced concepts of close-to-nature forestry as official management doctrine (Ott, 1987). In addition, some state foresters were instrumental in experimenting with and establishing (in the German context new) ideas such as small strictly protected forest areas as early as in the first half of the 20th century. Yet, when new environmental demands were formulated from the 1980s onwards, and environmental groups greatly grew in terms of membership and professionalization, direct access to policy and management decisions for civil society organizations and environmentalists was initially denied. In turn, these organizations have repeatedly expressed concern that forest policy in Baden-Württemberg is too strongly oriented toward timber production and, moreover, controlled by a coalition of timber and forest production interests (Weber, 1999; Winkel, 2007a; Cappellmann et al., 2011).

In response to pressure from NGOs and civil society, different conservative party-led governments of Baden-Württemberg have begun experimenting with more participatory approaches to forest policy-making over the last 15 years. A first step was made with the round-table negotiations on a regional forest policy program in the late 1990s and early 2000s (which was eventually put on hold once private forest owners withdrew their support), and a couple

Table 1
Important participatory processes in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy (as reported by the interviewees in 2012/2013).

Name	Date initiated and by whom	Participants ^a	Official purpose/goal ^a
National Park in the Northern Black Forest (MLR, 2013)	June 2011, by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR)	- General public - Representatives at community and county level - Environmental interests (state and private) - Forest industry - Recreation interests - Forestry organization (state and private)	- Incorporate information from and exchange information with the public - Reduce conflict - Increase acceptance of the plans to create a national park
Forest Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg (FVA-Baden-Württemberg, 2012)	March 2012, by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR)	- General public - Environmental organizations - Recreation interests - Forestry organization - Forest industry - Scientists	- Gather information - Reduce conflict - Increase acceptance of the strategy
Amendment to state game law (NABU, 2012; Fey, 2012)	December 2012–June 2013, by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR)	- Environmental organizations - Animal rights groups - Hunting associations - Political parties - City and county councils - Land owners associations	- Increase social acceptance of hunting - Reduce conflict among diverse interests - Access local knowledge
Re-integration of lynx (Lüchtrath et al., 2012)	2004, by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR)	- Environmental organizations - Forest industry - Forestry organizations - Hunting association - Agricultural association - Scientists	- Inform the public - Increase social acceptance of lynx - Reduce conflict among diverse interests - Access local knowledge

^a Information based on source indicated for each process (left column).

of subsequent participatory processes dealing with policy issues which quickly drew public attention, such as the conservation of flagship species, for instance the Western Capercaillie or the European Lynx. In the latter processes, participation was restricted to specific issues related to the protection of these endangered species (and did not deal with forest policy and management as a whole).

Yet, when a new government formed by a coalition of the Green Party and Social Democrats came into power in 2011, the participation of civil society organizations and citizens in public policy-making became an important element of the state's policy. The proclaimed intention of opening up the policy-making process to these groups is to increase information and communication among stakeholders and with policy decision makers (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und SPD, 2011). In forest policy, since that time, several participatory processes have continued or been newly initiated, for instance, the discussion process about a National Park in the Northern Black Forest (Nordschwarzwald), the amendment to State Game Law (Jagdgesetznovellierung), the 'Strategic Sustainability Management' (Strategisches Nachhaltigkeitsmanagement) of the State Forest Service referring to the development of broader objectives for forest management, or the 'Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg 2020' (Naturschutzstrategie Baden-Württemberg 2020) and the related 'Forest Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg' (Waldnaturschutzkonzeption Baden-Württemberg). Many of these programs not only added participatory elements to forest policy-making and the forest management process, but were also themselves developed in a participatory way (Hartard et al., 2011). Hence, it seems fair to say that Baden-Württemberg's forest policy has become a forerunner in terms of stakeholder and civil society participation within Germany.

Given the fact that these new developments constitute a significant departure from how forest policy and management decisions in Germany were made in the past, this paper aims to analyze the following questions:

(1) How is the "participatory turn" in forest policy-making in Baden-Württemberg perceived by forest policy actors?

(2) How does this new style of policy-making affect the overall controversy between forest sector and nature conservation actors in Baden-Württemberg?

Participation – concepts and prominent lines of critique

There is a great variety of understandings and definitions of participation available in the literature. Traditionally, participation in a representative democracy has referred to representation via voting for representatives to make future decisions. Yet, in the (post-)modern debate on governance, participation goes beyond such an understanding. Rather, in public and academic discussions it is understood as the involvement of non-state actors – organizations and the general public at large – in the policy-making process (Newig, 2011). Clearly, this allows for a range of activities to be considered as participation. To be able to analyze and compare different participatory processes, it is thus helpful to categorize them. Dietz and Stern (2008) differentiate five dimensions that allow for such a categorization (cf. Table 2)¹:

- (1) participants of a participation process, ranging from elected political representatives, administrators, and experts, to normal citizens (Dietz and Stern, 2008; Newig and Fritsch, 2009b);
- (2) the level of involvement or influence, ranging from being informed or consulted to participating in the actual decision (Rowe and Frewer, 2000); others expand this dimension to also include the possibility of a negotiated agreement as the most involved level of participation (Creighton, 2005);
- (3) the intensity of involvement, referring to the frequency and type of involvement, for example participating once, or multiple times, via written statements or one or two-way oral communication (Dietz and Stern, 2008; Newig, 2011; Rasche et al., 2007); only informing participants, for instance, implies

¹ Other categorization schemes have been developed, e.g., by Rasche et al. (2007) and Renn (2008). The authors decided to use the dimensions developed by Dietz and Stern (2008) as they are among the more comprehensive.

Table 2
Dimensions of participation (compilation based on [Dietz and Stern, 2008](#)).

Dimension		For example
Participants	Who should be included in a participatory process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected officials • Experts • Those directly affected • The general public
Level of involvement	What level of involvement and how much influence should participants have on the decision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information – little influence • Consultation – some influence • Co-decision-making – much influence • Negotiated agreement – highest level of influence
Intensity	How often and via what kind of communication should participants be involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once, monthly, annually, continuously • Top-down one-way, bottom-up one-way, two-way communication
Timing	At what point in the process should participants be involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem definition • Process development • Information gathering • Decision-making • Implementation
Goal	Which goal is being pursued?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation • Normative goal • Instrumental goal

- a one-way communication, whereas negotiating an agreement implies two-way communication ([Creighton, 2005](#));
- (4) the timing of participation, referring to the phase in the policy process in which stakeholders or citizens are involved, which range from the phase of problem formulation, process design, selecting opinions and outcomes, information gathering and synthesis, decision, to implementation and evaluation ([Dietz and Stern, 2008](#)); and finally,
- (5) the goal of participation. Two types of goals can be distinguished: instrumental and normative ones. Instrumental goals strive for better policies via participation in the sense of greater efficiency and effectiveness. For instance, participating stakeholders and citizens can provide valuable information and expertise, in particular on local issues ([Bulkeley and Mol, 2003](#)), which improve the policy substance-wise. Moreover, participatory processes are expected to give decisions greater legitimacy and acceptance, thus easing their implementation. And lastly, it is expected that repeated participatory processes result in trusting relationships between the public and government bureaucrats ([King and Stivers, 1998](#)), thereby facilitating future decision-making processes. Normative goals of participation refer – broadly speaking – to democratizing and empowering society by making decisions more transparent, and thus holding government entities accountable ([Dietz and Stern, 2008](#); [Newig and Fritsch, 2009b](#)).

In the context of environmental policy, participation is assumed to lead to better policy outcomes, meaning improved environmental conditions and easier implementation of the decisions compared to traditional, less inclusive modes of decision-making ([Newig and Fritsch, 2009a](#)). Some argue that this is because centralized bureaucratic government is not well suited to addressing the complexity of environmental problems ([Koontz and Thomas, 2006](#)).

There is, however, doubt among some scholars about the extent to which these expected benefits of participation, both in terms of (environmental) quality of the decision (output) and in terms of facilitating its implementation (outcome), are actually achieved. In an analysis of participatory processes in different countries, [Newig and Fritsch \(2009a\)](#) found no significant evidence that participatory processes result in greater environmental quality of these decisions. In some cases it actually reduced it. One reason may be that participatory decisions tend to rely at least partly on non-scientific, local knowledge, which may incorporate different perceptions of risks and uncertainty than scientific assessments

([Dietz and Stern, 2008](#); [Renn, 2008](#)). In addition, local knowledge is frequently related to interests and perceptions other than environmental scientific ones. In this sense, participatory processes may lead to more ‘democratic’, but not necessarily more environmentally friendly policy outcomes. In line with such critique, others argue that broad participation also leads to trivial, toothless, and vague results that seem to be inefficient or that put disproportionate emphasis on individual issues or particular interests ([Dietz and Stern, 2008](#); [Renn, 2008](#); [Sanders, 1997](#)). Being limited in terms of both geographic scope and time horizons, they can run counter to achieving sustainable solutions which tend to be large scale and oriented toward the longer term ([Feindt and Newig, 2005](#)).

Beyond these output-focused aspects, critics have also questioned the contribution of participation to easing the implementation of environmental decisions (outcome). [Newig and Fritsch \(2009a\)](#) found that, in a majority of cases, participatory processes did not contribute to easier implementation of environmental decisions. Only in situations with low levels of conflict that are not in the public spotlight, with little asymmetry in power and the presence of win-win potential, as well as an appropriate representation of social interests and a fair participatory process, are desired outputs and outcomes likely to be achieved.

Another point of criticism relate to the potential for political manipulation. [Winkel and Sotirov \(2011\)](#), for example, point to a mostly strategic use by powerful policy makers of participatory processes in the National Forest Program in Germany and Bulgaria. In this paper, they also point out that participation did not trigger substantial (that is, policy content-related) policy learning amongst participants. Stakeholder groups were not willing or able to renegotiate and match their preferences beyond merely symbolic, vague consensus formulations. They did not move toward a more integrated forest policy approach beyond an ‘instrumental’ level (that is, they were soon able to adapt to a new mode of political bargaining within the boundaries set by participatory processes).

In some instances, participatory processes can result in increased conflict ([Walker and Hurley, 2004](#)), for example, if participants develop contrary points of view rather than find consensus, or if differences in power and resources among the participants result in the perception of an unfair process, such as where ordinary citizens sit across from industry representatives or government officials and feel unable to challenge their counterpart’s position because of a lack of specialized knowledge ([Booth and Halseth, 2011](#)). This can be particularly difficult for government agencies, as such processes do not provide them with a clear way forward ([Dietz and Stern, 2008](#)). Additionally, government agencies trying

Table 3
Data by data source and actor group.

	Workshop Number of participants	Online discussion Number of participants	Interviews Number of interviewees
State forestry	10	5	4
State conservation	1	2	0
Private forestry	2	4	2
Private conservation	3	7	2
Scientific experts	1	3	2

to incorporate participatory approaches have to undergo organizational change, which can be a challenging and time-consuming process (Swearingen White, 2001). Finally, some raise the issue of fairness of the process. As Olsen points out, specialized interests representing a small group of people are more likely to be organized and thus are more likely to be represented in a participatory process. Collective interests on the other hand, shared by many or all members of society, are less likely to be organized due to the incentive to free-ride, and thus are less likely to be represented. This ultimately leads to a bias toward specialized interests (Olsen, 1971).

Methodological approach

In this paper, we use three distinct types of data to explore how the current trend toward participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy is perceived by policy actors, and what, if any, effect it may have on the relationship between forest and nature conservation actors.

First, we analyzed written contributions to a one month-long online discussion that had been advertised broadly via different tools and media, and was open to any interested person in March 2012. Second, we processed oral contributions to a one-day stakeholder workshop which took place in May 2012. Both events were part of the process of developing the 'Forest Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg' (Waldnaturschutzstrategie Baden-Württemberg), organized by the State Forest Service research branch (Forstliche Versuchs- und Forschungsanstalt), the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR Baden-Württemberg) in cooperation with forestry experts. Contributions to the online discussion were made available in written form. For the stakeholder workshop, we used participant observation and voice recording to collect data; these recordings were later fully transcribed.

Third, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews with forest policy actors in Baden-Württemberg, including representatives of the state forest service, private forestry, the forest-based industry, as well as private conservation organizations, and scientific experts in the field. Interviewees thus represented, in an exploratory manner, important organized groups that have been active in recent forest policy participation processes and that also contributed to the online discussion and the stakeholder workshop. Interviews were conducted between November 2012 and January 2013. The interviews were recorded and later fully transcribed.

Hence, all data was available in written form and was coded and analyzed according categories representing the dimensions of participation outlined by Dietz and Stern (2008) (cf. Table 1). Yet, additional categories, for example related to the need for increased legitimacy, or the future role of participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy, were added based on questions that had been asked during the interviews.

The interview data as well as the workshop and online discussion contributions were categorized with regard to five different groups of actors: state forestry (state forest agency employees, representatives of the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection Baden-Württemberg (MLR Baden-Württemberg)), state

conservation (state conservation agency employees), private forestry (forest owners (associations), wood product industry), private conservation (representatives of non-governmental environmental organizations), and scientific experts representing different forest science disciplines. This categorization was developed inductively based on significant differences in the argumentation of these groups, but also reflects existing categorizations proposed by scholars (Krott, 2001; Winkel, 2008). Table 3 displays all the data included in this study organized by data source and actor group.

In the following section, we present each actor groups' perception of participation in forest policy and management, combining the insights gained from the workshop and the online discussion contributions, as well as the qualitative interviews.

Results

State forestry representatives

Our data indicate mixed attitudes among state forestry representatives toward participation in forest policy and management. Generally, forest managers at the local level expressed the greatest concerns, whereas representatives of the higher administrative levels hold a more positive attitude. Yet, some support toward participation was also expressed by local level forest managers from urban areas.

Interestingly, all interviewees from this group suggested that the greatest potential for increasing legitimacy through participation would be at the local level. The most frequently voiced expectation was that participatory processes at this level could contribute to a better understanding of forest issues by the public, and – referring to past experience – also reduce conflict between different interests. At the state level, however, state forestry representatives foresee no increase in legitimacy through participatory processes. At this level, they expect that participatory processes would be (mis-)used by organized interest groups (as opposed to citizens), and thus mostly serve strategic lobbying efforts.

Having said that, some state forestry actors do see value in increasing participation at the state level. For example, they mentioned increased transparency of the forest sector through involvement of conservation interests or the public as a desirable goal. Many argued that participation – at both the local and state level – has the potential to lead to greater public acceptance of the decisions reached, thus reducing conflict during the implementation phase (instrumental goals). As for the level of involvement of stakeholders and the timing of participation, state forestry representatives suggest mostly information (one-way) and consultation (two-way) targeting a broad range of (organized) interest groups in the post-decision phases. That is, participation should be used to decide on alternative ways to implement policy decisions that have already been made. Both recreation and conservation groups were listed as potential partners in participatory processes, yet mention of the latter in particular was accompanied by skeptical statements about the practicability of such an inclusion (see also paragraph below). When asked about preferred partners in participatory decision-making processes, the state conservation agency

was frequently mentioned. This is interesting as inter-agency coordination can hardly be considered to be participation in the sense of the literature. Hence, these statements may serve as an indicator of the high degree of sectoral closeness in forest policy-making in the past, where even state conservation actors had little access to forest policy-making in Baden-Württemberg. Advocacy was rarely found to include regular citizens and the public at large. Overall, the data suggests that the level of participants' influence on decisions envisioned by state forestry representatives is low, with the exception of the state conservation agency, which should be continuously and actively included in forest policy decision-making processes.

In line with this critical perspective, several concerns regarding participation were raised by state forestry actors during the workshop, online discussions, and interviews. While some of the arguments relate to a general objection to the concept, others refer to specific aspects of past participatory processes and the practical implementation of participatory approaches. When making the first type of arguments, state forestry representatives questioned the legitimacy of allowing organized interests or the general public to influence forest policy decisions. During the interviews, it was frequently argued that only the parliament has the legitimacy to make policy decisions. Participation should then be sought during the implementation phase. Finally, state forestry actors mentioned fiscal, time, and resource constraints, lack of technical expertise among some participants, and unbalanced representation of interests as limiting the practicability and desirability of participatory approaches.

Criticism based on past experiences amongst this group focused primarily on private conservation organizations. State forestry interviewees perceived these organizations as being unable to compromise. One interview partner said "*Participation is a give and take. But those demanding participation (referring to conservation interests) are not willing to give. To them, participation seems to mean convincing others to do it their way*". Several state forestry interviewees argued that conservation actors, and private conservation organizations in particular, were currently in an advantageous political position given their ideological and personal closeness to high level members of the government, and the generally strong support for conservation amongst the population. As a consequence, conservation actors are perceived as being able to achieve their objectives without necessarily trying to reach compromise with other interests. Thus, from the state forestry perspective, the perceived potential for improving relations between forest and conservation interests through participation is low. This is despite one interviewee's argument that the already high environmental standards that forest management currently adheres to should provide a base for more agreement between the groups.

Asked about the future they foresee for participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy, state actors predict that this will depend mostly on the extent to which future state governments emphasize participation. But generally speaking they expect participation to continue to play a role, particularly in large-scale projects, such as the fiercely debated new national park in the Northern Black Forest.

Private forestry actors

Amongst private forestry representatives, our data reveal a widely shared skeptical attitude toward participation. Interviewees did not feel the need to increase legitimacy of forest policy decision through participation, and questioned the legitimacy of involving non-elected actors in decision-making processes. Informing the public and other stakeholders as has been done in the past was deemed sufficient.

The online discussion and workshop data revealed private forestry representatives' concerns regarding stakeholder

participation in forest policy. Even though participation is currently only related to public forests, private forestry stakeholders fear a subsequent "spill-over" of participation demands in relation to private forestry issues. Among the main concerns voiced by this group were potentially negative impacts of involving multiple stakeholders on the scope of freedom for private forest owners to manage their land, thereby possibly compromising their economic profits. Interview data helped identify some of the causes of this concern. Central is the perception that participatory processes would give greater credence to environmental concerns. This is assumed to be the case partly because environmental organizations are perceived to be more skilled in public relations, but also because environmental interests are perceived to have greater support among the general public. Forest management for timber production, on the other hand, would be viewed negatively by the majority of the population, according to private forestry stakeholders. Interviewees suggested that if different stakeholders (such as forestry, conservation and recreation organizations) need to be included in decision-making processes, scientists should serve as a neutral translator of technical knowledge. The primary purpose of involving stakeholders was seen in informing them about forest management issues. One interview partner argued that if different stakeholders need to be included in decision-making processes, their respective influence on the final decision should be proportional to the extent to which they are affected by these decisions. In this case, private forest owners whose income depends on their land should have the greatest say.

Other points of criticism expressed by private forestry representatives included the perception that past participatory processes were only symbolic and did not truly include the contributions from private forestry groups in the final decision. Furthermore, it was argued that past processes had been used for political profiling rather than finding balanced decisions. As a result, private forestry representatives indicated that past experiences with participatory processes have actually increased mistrust toward other stakeholders, in particular private conservation actors. As for the current situation, private forestry interviewees suggested – similar to state forestry representatives – that private conservation organizations would have too much influence on the outcomes of participatory processes due to the conservation friendly attitude of the current government and the public support for environmental issues. In addition, conservation stakeholders and the general public would lack forestry expertise.

Private forestry actors expect participation to continue to be an issue in forest policy, yet not at the current level of intensity. They mention a lack of financial and human resources as a limitation to participating in these processes, and indicated that they would like to see the use of participatory processes streamlined in order to reduce the amount of time and resources required to participate. The institutionalization of formal hearings involving different organized interests (*Verbandsanhörung*) as part of political decision-making processes would be an example of how an initially time-consuming practice could be streamlined and thereby turned into a viable means of contributing to political decisions.

State conservation representatives

Findings for this group are based on data from the workshop and online discussion only. Attitudes toward participation range from skeptical to positive. One individual noted that participatory processes are increasingly becoming normal political practice, and is conscious that the public demands this approach. However, views differ with respect to who should be participating at which point in time. Whereas all members of this group support efforts to increase communication and consultation between agencies, one state conservation representative was skeptical about involving

other stakeholder groups or the general public. According to this actor, citizen participation in particular is associated with reduced efficiency. Another individual, however, suggested that there is a place for citizen participation, arguing that informing or consulting with citizens would likely increase their identification with the decisions made, increase efficiency by adding local knowledge, and add to citizens' understanding of natural resource issues. In general, this group of actors associates primarily instrumental goals with participation, such as increasing the resilience of decisions, building networks of trust and improving efficiency.

Interestingly, similar to state forestry representatives, inter-agency coordination with the forest services is frequently understood as participation. Yet, there are also different opinions regarding the desirable level of inter-agency coordination. While some argue for better information practices, indicating a low level of influence for a "participating" agency, others argue for consultation with two-way communication among different agencies, suggesting a higher level of influence. While there was no direct mention of when participation should ideally take place in a policy process, the positive description of the Forest Conservation Strategy Baden-Württemberg process by one individual suggests that participation at the beginning of a decision process, as well as following the initial information gathering, is viewed as desirable. State conservation actors point out that the extent and benefits of participation in general depend on the time, financial, and human resources available to devote to such processes. There is agreement amongst state conservationists that, under current conditions, it is not realistic to expect an expansion of participatory efforts by the state conservation agency.

Private conservation actors

This group displayed a positive attitude toward expanding participation in the forest policy context. They advocate for increasing involvement of private conservation actors, but also other stakeholder organizations, the public at large, and independent (scientific) experts. Participation of the state conservation agency in forest policy decisions was assumed as given amongst this group. During interviews, actors said that participation of stakeholders and citizens does increase legitimacy of forest policy, as society demands to be included. Additionally, private conservation actors argue that the inclusion of conservation interests in forest policy adds to the decisions' legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This is because conservation issues have gained increasing public support in recent decades, a perception that is shared by all forestry groups (see above). The desired level of involvement ranges from information and consultation to co-decision-making, with the latter two being the most popular. Several representatives of this group emphasize that participants need to see their contribution in participatory processes reflected in the final decision.

As to the time of stakeholder involvement, private conservation actors argue that participation would ideally be part of the entire process of policy-making, however, they consider this to be unrealistic due to time and resource constraints. Private conservation representatives describe both instrumental and normative participation goals. For example, they mention improving decision quality by including local and (independent) scientific knowledge. Participation is also expected to reduce conflict and ease implementation (instrumental goals). Normative goals mentioned include democratizing society; some also argued during the workshop and online discussions that public forests belong to the citizens, thus necessitating that citizens have a say in their management.

There is little criticism of participation in general. Private conservation actors feel their organizational structures and public-relations experience is of benefit to them in participatory processes. However, they also face challenges. On the one hand, points of

criticism relate to implementation practices. For example, private conservation representatives claim that, in some instances in the past, the state forest service conducted participatory processes that did not include the contributions of conservation interests in the final decision. Interviewees point out that such merely symbolic participation processes have built mistrust amongst different stakeholder groups, and should be avoided in the future. As for the amount of time and resources required to engage in participatory processes, private conservation representatives, similar to private forestry actors, underline the need to find alternative paths that allow for participation in a more routine oriented and streamlined manner to reduce the amount of time and human resources required. Asked about the role they foresee for participation in the future, private conservation groups were confident that participation will be an integral part of forest policy in the long term, and will increase especially at the local level and in urban areas.

Scientific experts

The academic experts included in this study displayed a positive attitude toward participation, yet, they also voice concerns regarding current participation practices. They support the notion that society should have a say in the management of public forests, thus they agree that participatory decision-making can increase legitimacy. Again, close collaboration between the state forestry and state conservation agencies is described as desirable and necessary. Other stakeholders to be involved include organized interests such as conservation or recreation groups, forest owners, experts and the general public. One interviewee suggests that participation works best under conditions that are currently not fulfilled in most cases. These include no political profiling by interest groups and continued engagement by the same individuals over a longer period of time, preferably at the local level.

Regarding the optimal level of stakeholder influence, opinions ranged from information to consultation, indicating a low to medium level of influence. One interviewee said that while greater levels of influence were desirable, they would not be realistic due to the time and resource commitment required to reach a decision with multiple stakeholders involved. Thus, this expert suggests that honest communication about the limits of participation would be the better choice. Another interviewee argues that higher levels of influence (such as co-deciding or negotiated agreements) go against the idea of parliamentary democracy, and questions the legitimacy of non-elected individuals influencing decisions. This expert underlines the strategic use by conservation organizations of opportunities to participate combined with the lack of knowledge regarding the general public's expectations toward forest management – thereby calling into question the perception of all other groups that the public support more conservation.

Scientific experts mention both instrumental and normative goals of participation. For instance, they point to improved understanding of issues and greater decision quality as a result of the multiple sources of knowledge that participation would make accessible. Participation would also help to resolve conflicts among different social interests. Finally, normative goals that were underlined include democratization of policy-making, as participation provides an instrument for citizens to balance social norms and values against scientific and expert knowledge.

Criticism focused on implementation practices was more pronounced than that of the concept of participation itself. One interviewee mentioned that some past participatory processes in forest policy were characterized by particular interest groups taking advantage of the opportunity to realize their objectives, rather than trying to find compromise among different stakeholders. Moreover, interest groups would evaluate participation in terms

of whether or not they expect it to be suitable for achieving their goals.

The experts included in this study expect participation to continue to play a role in forest policy in Baden-Württemberg – partly because it would be politically unacceptable to retract this development given the current positive normative power of participation in the political discourse. However, they emphasized that the current practices are not suitable for productive participation, referring in particular to the amount of time and resources required to participate. They recommend moving away from broad, large-scale processes at the state level toward more focused efforts which include a limited and stable set of stakeholders, and target a specific issue or problem at the local level. It was expected that such processes would limit the incentive and opportunity for political profiling by professional interest groups, and thus contribute to more productive participation oriented toward consensus or compromises.

Summary

Overall, our data indicates striking differences in the perception of participation between, but also within the actor groups. Private conservation actors are the strongest supporters of participatory approaches, while actors representing private forestry interests are the most skeptical. The significant difference between these two relates to the question of which participants should be involved, and the influence these stakeholders should have on the final decision. Conservation actors argue for the inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders in low to high influence modes of participation (information, consultation, co-decision-making), while private forest actors take a contrary position, generally arguing against broad stakeholder participation, and favoring one-way information transfer over all other types of involvement. Academia and state conservation actors both described mostly positive perceptions of participation. Both advocate for the inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders. As for participants and the level of involvement, they argue for the inclusion of organized interests as well as the general public via information, but also consultation. Data relating to the state forestry actors indicates a variety of perceptions within this group, ranging from skeptical to positive attitudes. Many positive statements referred, however, to participation in the sense of better inter-agency coordination. While the other groups also did not display uniform opinions, the multitude of opinions was more pronounced among state forestry actors. It remains an open question as to what extent this diversity of opinions is also related to the greater volume of data available for this group. Within the group, higher level administrators tend to be more positive about expanding participation in forest policy decisions compared to lower level state forestry personnel; additionally, urban forest administrators at the local level are generally more open to participatory decision-making processes compared to their rural counterparts.

Amongst all analyzed groups, those in favor of participation listed primarily instrumental goals. Examples include increasing transparency and legitimacy, reducing conflict, and easing implementation of decisions. Private conservation actors also mentioned normative goals, for example democratization of the process. Criticism voiced by opponents referred to both the concept of participation (for instance the legitimacy of non-elected stakeholders influencing decisions, as well as the quality of their contributions) and specifics related to its implementation. Many stakeholders mentioned the high costs associated with implementing participation and demanded that participatory processes be organized more efficiently in the future.

Finally, stakeholders have different perceptions of the effect of a more participatory policy-making style on the overall relationship between forest use and conservation actors. While some

see the opportunity for mutual learning and new compromises through participation processes, others are skeptical. Particularly at the state policy level, several stakeholders point to the prevalence of strategic motives to engage or disengage in participation, which hampers any chance to achieve mutual learning or to build new compromises. The private conservation and private forestry groups blame each other for mostly strategic (dis-)engagement in participation, and both blame the state forest service and the government respectively for merely strategic use of participation in the past, resulting in the exclusion of their demands.

Table 4 provides an overview of the distinct perceptions of all groups in relation to participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy.

Discussion

What can be learned from our assessment of stakeholder perceptions of participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy?

First, our results reveal that participation is mostly assessed in terms of its strategic importance amongst stakeholders. As a rule, forestry groups are skeptical. They argue for only careful application of participation in policy-making, mostly limited to delivering information. However, conservationists and private conservation groups in particular, are mostly positively disposed toward participation, including co-decision-making. In this way, a positive perception of increased participation is inversely correlated to the past influence of the respective group on forest management and decision-making during the pre-participation era in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy. Those who were most excluded under the former forest policy arrangement that was driven by sectorally closed decision-making and a shared ideology that forests must be used for timber production – namely private conservation groups – are to date most supportive toward increased participation. On the contrary, private forest owners – who hold extensive property rights on their forest land under the liberal Baden-Württemberg forest law – are most skeptical.

Yet, both private conservation groups and private forestry groups share the perception of a problematic legacy of efforts to increase participation in forest policy. On the one hand, both groups claim that the government/state Forest Service has, in the past, frequently excluded their demands from (final) decision-making. This creates, according to them, a historic baggage of 'pseudo participation' which still hampers current initiatives. On the other hand, both private conservation and forestry groups accuse each other of having exploited participation merely for strategic reasons. These vice versa accusations indicate a significant degree of conflict arising from a legacy of political confrontation that includes, but also goes beyond participatory efforts in forest policy. The resulting polarization makes efforts to increase participation in forest policy-making a delicate process: Any current and future policy initiative is likely to be assessed predominately in terms of its strategic importance for pushing through particular objectives (or preventing the achievement of competing objectives) by both private forestry and private conservation groups. This situation renders the possibility of mutual learning and compromise rather low at this time. In this sense, participation has not yet significantly changed the substantial dimension of the controversy between forestry and conservation actors in Baden-Württemberg, but has added an additional (instrumental) strategy to how this controversy is fought out.

The perception of both private groups – forest owners and conservationists – of having been excluded during decision-making in previous, 'pseudo-participatory' approaches is not shared by representatives of the state forestry group. Yet, the legacy of a sectorally closed, hierarchical or even autonomous culture of administration

Table 4
Stakeholder perceptions of participation in Baden-Württemberg's forest policy.

	State forestry	State conservation	Private forestry	Private conservation	Scientific experts
General attitude toward participation	Mixed: higher level administrators and urban personnel more positive compared to local level and rural personnel	Range from skeptical to positive	Negative Fear that participation may limit their freedom to manage their land, resulting in reduced economic profits	Positive	Positive Experts note, however, that participation works best under conditions that are rarely fulfilled, such as continued involvement of the same individuals over a longer period of time
Participants to be involved	Different opinions, support for more inter-agency cooperation, more critical toward including stakeholder groups; objection to including the general public	Different opinions, support for more inter-agency collaboration, more critical toward including stakeholder groups; mixed views on including the general public	Range from no need to include diverse interests to broad representation of interests for the purpose of informing stakeholders; Stakeholders' involvement should be tied to the degree to which they are affected	Stakeholder organizations, the general public; Independent (scientific) experts	State conservation agency (inter-agency coordination), organized interests including recreation and conservation interests, forest owners, experts, general public
Level of influence	Low levels of influence mostly information, also consultation	Low to medium levels of influence (information and consultation)	Low levels of influence (only information); if more influence is foreseen, this influence should depend on the level of affectedness Preferably no involvement	High levels of influence including co-decision and negotiated agreements Participants' input needs to be reflected in the process outcomes Ideally intense involvement during all phases of a decision process, but considered unrealistic due to time and resource constraints	Low to medium levels of influence (information, consultation); higher levels of influence desirable, but considered not realistic, also legitimacy must be considered Involvement during all phases of a decision process, intensity limited by actors' resources
Timing and intensity of participation	Rather low-intensity involvement during post-decision phases (i.e., implementation)	Preferably from the onset of a decision process, yet not too intense because of a lack of resources			
Goals of participation	Instrumental	Instrumental	n/a	Normative and instrumental	Normative and instrumental
Effects of participation on legitimacy of policy-making	Local level: positive effect; participation adds to peoples' understanding and knowledge and may reduce conflict State policy level: rather negative effect as participation is (mis-) used strategically by interest groups for specific policy goals	n/a	No need to increase legitimacy through participation	Legitimacy increases through participation because society demands inclusive decision-making processes	Society should have a say in the management of public forests, thus participation would increase legitimacy if it is not misused for strategic purposes
Effect of participation on conflicts between conservation and forest interests	Certain potential for more agreement due to already high conservation standards in forest management No actual reduction in conflict because (private) conservation interests are not willing to compromise	n/a	Symbolic nature of past participatory processes has rather increased distrust among stakeholders	High potential to make forest policy more democratic, and thus reduce conflict. Yet, the symbolic nature of past participatory processes has rather increased distrust among stakeholders	Positive effects are possible, yet more likely at the local level as interest groups tend to engage only strategically in participation at the state level.
Criticism	Legitimacy of interest groups or members of the public to influence decisions is questionable Amount of resources required for participatory processes is too large Unbalanced representation of interests and lack of knowledge among participants is problematic	Large amount of resources required for participatory processes is problematic, particularly if citizens are involved	The legitimacy of interest groups or the public to influence decision-making is questionable. Amount of resources required for participatory processes is too high. Input from private forestry interest was not considered in past participatory processes, while private conservation has had too much influence	Cases of merely symbolic use of participation by the forest service in the past Amount of resources required for participatory processes is too high	Individual interests taking advantage of the opportunity to realize their objectives rather than trying to find compromise Amount of resources required for participatory processes is too large. Legitimacy of interest groups or the public to influence decision-making is questionable.
Future role of participation	Will continue to play a role, extent will depend on the respective government. Future participation should, however, be reduced to large-scale projects and their implementation stage	Continuation is likely, but increasing participation of stakeholder groups and citizens under current financial, resource and personnel conditions is not realistic	Participation will continue to play a role in future forest policy, but not at the current levels (has to be reduced and different processes need to be streamlined)	Participation will continue to be an integral part of forest policy, expected to increase in particular at local level and in urban areas	Participation will continue to play a role as it would be politically disadvantageous to retract from it. One recommendation is to move away from broad, large-scale processes toward more focused efforts

and decision-making (Bogumil, 2005) clearly characterizes the state forestry coalition and their take on participation. That is, state forestry representative assign stakeholder participation mostly to the implementation phase (once a political decision has been legitimized by the parliament) and to the provision of information. In this respect, the perception of inter-agency coordination as participation, which is shared by both state conservation and state forestry actors, is telling (cf. State forestry representatives section and State Conservation representatives section). The state forest administration does not, however, form a unified 'block'. That is, different perspectives are represented within the agency. While higher-level state forest service bureaucrats, as well as local level staff in urban areas tended to be more inclined toward participation, lower-level staff in rural areas was not. This raises the question of whether there is a divide developing within the agency or whether it is simply politically necessary for high-level bureaucrats to support participation, given its strong general public and political backing.

A group that is largely excluded from the debates about participation in forest policy-making is the general public. Only representatives of private conservation groups and one scientist supported the participation of 'regular' citizens in the decision-making process, while many other stakeholders had significant reservations regarding such a step. These reservations relate to a lack of resources for organizing such an involvement, a perceived lack of adequate knowledge amongst citizens, as well as the problem of selecting representative citizen participants. In addition, the widespread perception that 'regular' citizens will likely support conservation demands may limit the willingness of forestry actors to consider this group, whereas this perception may make it easier for private conservation organizations to advocate for citizens' involvement. Connected to these distinct views is the question of the policy levels at which participation should take place. Interestingly enough, there is a certain consensus amongst different groups that more effective (and less polarized) participation processes will likely take place at the local level, as opposed to the state policy level. Yet, this claim contradicts the reluctance to engage 'regular' citizens in the debate, given that interest group representation at the local level is only partially given – which is again exactly the motivation for targeting the local level by those supporting this idea (for an interesting comparison of "policy level" versus local, "action level" approaches to participation in natural resource management, see Robinson et al., 2011). Finally, a shared concern amongst interest groups, scientists, and state conservation and forestry employees is that intense participation may exceed the resources and capacities of involved groups. Given that this is one of the few issues where perceptions of all groups merge, this issue demands high attention if the participatory approach to forest policy-making is to be maintained, or even strengthened in Baden-Württemberg in the future.

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that the – potentially historic – 'transformation' process from a sectorally closed, professional expertise-based system of forest policy-making in Baden-Württemberg toward a more open and transparent system that integrates distinct stakeholders via participation, and may eventually even provide access points for citizens' direct participation in decision-making, is still in its infancy. Supporters and opponents of such a transformation process are in agreement with regard to perceived losses or gains through new options of influence, compared to the previous situation. Yet, the preliminary instrumental perception of participation by stakeholder groups should not be overemphasized given the rather short time frame since the transformation process was initiated. It is still too early to evaluate the

participatory turn in forest policy comprehensively. Yet, this paper has indicated where challenges related to the transformation process can be made out. Such challenges include the cultural 'path dependency' of stakeholders still being used to traditional government, a narrow understanding of participation including only professional lobby groups while neglecting the broader citizenry, and an overall lack of resources, skills and capacities amongst both administrations and stakeholders related to the engagement in these processes. Clearly, more research will be needed to better understand these challenges, and their long-term effects.

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