



The “German model” of integrative multifunctional forest management—Analysing the emergence and political evolution of a forest management concept☆



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ABSTRACT

Forest policy and management are subject to various and often conflicting demands, which internationally have led to distinct policy responses and related management paradigms. These range from a strong focus on commodity production complemented by economic rationalities – e.g. focusing on plantations – to community-based or social forestry approaches highlighting local participation and stakeholder engagement, to a focus on ecosystem services and conservation. A major challenge involves the potential orientation of the overall forest policy and management paradigm either towards integrating manifold demands more or less evenly across an area, or towards dividing the land base into forest areas with different management priorities. The specific reconciliation and integration of both sides of the spectrum have been at the centre of scientific and political discussion on forest policy and management for several decades. In this context, the “German model” of integrative and multifunctional forest management has received international attention. It is regarded as an example for integrating diverse (societal and ecological) demands into a timber-production-oriented management approach. At the same time, the model’s primary focus on timber production has been criticised by some. In this paper, we analyse the political dimension of the German model by tracing the birth and evolution of the so-called LÖWE programme, a much noticed governmental forest management programme in the German state of Lower Saxony. LÖWE has frequently been presented as a particularly successful example of multifunctional forestry. We first assess the specific societal and political circumstances that led to the establishment of the programme 20 years ago. Subsequently, we assess its political function in forest policy debates about various demands on Lower Saxony’s public forests. We show that the evolution of the programme can be interpreted in two distinct but non-exclusive ways. On the one hand, LÖWE was a strategic success story for the Forest Service because it aligned (and also appeased) conflicting demands in line with the changing political priorities. On the other hand, it also embodied a learning process towards environmental policy integration. By underlining LÖWE as an example of the German model of integrative multifunctional forest management, we reiterate the strategic importance of this model in the German context and also highlight future challenges and related research needs.

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1. Introduction

The sustainable management and conservation of the world’s forests remains a major challenge. Confronted with an enormous variety of social needs and demands ranging from biomass/wood production, biodiversity conservation, aesthetic and cultural values to the importance of forests for climate change mitigation, various approaches to forest management and conservation have developed (Umans, 1993). These can

be characterised as forest or resource management paradigms defined as sets “of common values, beliefs, and shared wisdom that collectively provides the lens through which individuals in resource management professions form attitudes and upon which they base their actions” (Brown and Harris, 1992, 232). Winkel (2014), for instance, describes four major forest management paradigms (industrial forestry, sustained yield/multipurpose forestry, ecosystem management/conservation, and social forestry) in the US Pacific Northwest. These are closely connected to specific forest policy actor groups and their respective values and interests, but they are also supported by different scientific disciplines with their specific paradigms and related types of generated knowledge.

The diversity of societal preferences and related forest management paradigms is reflected in a specific spatial distribution of management patterns. In many forested regions of the world, a clear separation or

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segregation exists between extensively managed or fully conserved natural forests and intensively managed (plantation) forests. Other regions, specifically in temperate but partially also in boreal and tropical areas, strive for integrated forest management schemes. Integration refers here to combining, at least to some degree, wood production and the provision of other forest services within the same forest area (Lindenmayer and Franklin, 2002; Winkel, 2008; García-Fernández et al., 2008; Gustafsson et al., 2012; Kraus and Krumm, 2013; Schulz et al., 2014). In this regard, Central Europe has a reputation for emphasising integrative and “multifunctional” approaches to forest management (Brukas and Weber, 2009; Winkel and Jump, 2014; Winter et al., 2014). These approaches highlight the provision of multiple forest ecosystem services including a focus on wood production and the harvesting of a significant proportion of the annual increment.

While the practical management aspects are one facet of such approaches, their political meaning is equally important. The German model of integrative multifunctional forestry is perceived as being “attracted towards a harmonious image of forest policy” devoted to common welfare (Krott, 2005, 11; Ruppert-Winkel and Winkel, 2011). It has been praised for its potential to balance various demands and to enable wood production even in an urbanised societal context, culminating in the often used phrase: “Schutz durch Nutzung” (“conservation through utilization”) (DFWR, German Forestry Council, 2008). At the same time, precisely this integration and attempted harmonisation of conflicting demands under a management scheme, perceived as being technically centred on sustained yield, has prompted critique from scholars and stakeholders alike. Inter-alia, the underlying assumption of forestry that all societally relevant services are supplied “in the wake” of timber production has been criticised (Glück and Pleschberger, 1982). An inherent tendency of such approaches to obscure trade-offs between timber production, recreation, and biodiversity conservation rather than regulating these has been observed (Winkel, 2006, 2014). Moreover, the strategic political importance of the German model for protecting the autonomy of the state forest services has been frequently stressed (Krott, 1985; Weber, 2004; Winkel, 2006; Pistorius et al., 2012; Suda and Pukall, 2014). Being literally squeezed between the private sector – a timber industry which demands market-oriented reforms in the sector and an intensification of management practices – and an environmental movement promoting more conservation-oriented forest management practices, forest services attempted to use the model to demonstrate leadership by taking into account and integrating very distinct and often conflicting demands (Krott, 1985; Sotirov and Winkel, 2015). In this sense, Suda and Pukall (2014) have characterized the use of multifunctionality with regard to forest management regimes as an “empty formula enabling consensus” (337).

In this paper, we take the divergent interpretations of the political importance of the German model of integrative multifunctional forestry in the academic debate as a starting point for a closer empirical assessment of the model’s strategic meaning as a tool for the integration of broad societal, but also specifically environmental, demands on forest management. The model or approach stands exemplary for the ambition to “integrate” various societal demands towards forest in a “multifunctional/multipurpose” approach to management. It is presented by some as the solution to the problems of sustainable management of the world’s forests (co-existence of protection and sustainable management), while others are more sceptical and underline the political, strategic potential of the approach to dilute conflicts instead of tackling them. It is this ambiguity and diversity of meanings that this paper aims to explore.

Our analysis targets the level of the Federal States (*Länder*). We take this approach because the development of forest management programmes in the federal German policy system rests at this level, with the Federal States formulating and implementing forest policy goals within a legal framework set by the Federal Forest Law, further federal laws, and respective non-binding national strategies (e.g. the Forest Strategy 2020 and the German National Strategy on Biodiversity).

More specifically, we select the case of the LÖWE programme, a governmental forest management programme in the German state of Lower Saxony, as an example of the German integrative approach to multifunctional forestry. LÖWE explicitly addresses the idea of multifunctional and “close-to-nature” forestry in the public forests. It is one of the earliest examples in Germany of a political programme explicitly targeting this type of management, including a strong emphasis on environmental aspects. In this regard, it has received sustained political attention in Germany and internationally and can be understood as an exemplary case of the German model. The focus on LÖWE was motivated by the need to understand the variety of social, economic, and scientific factors that feed in the development of a forest management paradigm and the intention to more comprehensively evaluate LÖWE’s potential to contribute to the sustainable management of the world’s forests.

The LÖWE programme (programme for long-term ecological forest development) was adopted in 1991 after several years of preparation and negotiations especially within the state forest service administration and the ministries of agriculture and environment. Its political importance was underpinned by being made compulsory through a governmental decree. Since then, LÖWE has been embraced and upheld by subsequent governments of different political affiliations.

In this paper, we focus on the LÖWE programme and investigate

- a) which factors and processes led to the establishment of this integrative multifunctional forest management programme, and,
- b) what strategic importance it has had over time.

Finally, we will draw conclusions on the importance of the German model of integrative multifunctional forest management in the global forest policy context.

2. Theoretical perspective

This paper considers multifunctional forestry and analyses the LÖWE programme through the conceptual lens of environmental policy integration (EPI). EPI is both a political programme and a scientific concept. It refers to the inclusion of environmental aspects in all policy areas. This inclusion of environmental aspects can take place in decision-making processes and outputs as well as in the implementation of public policy (e.g. Hertin and Berkhout, 2003; Persson, 2004; Jordan and Lenschow, 2010). EPI can consist of consideration (weak EPI) or prioritisation (strong EPI) of environmental concerns in other policy areas (Jordan and Lenschow, 2010). The scholarly concept of EPI comprises different strands: the institutional, political, and cognitive perspectives (ibid.). The institutional perspective highlights the challenge of EPI practices associated with governments that are functionally differentiated into sectoral ministries (e.g. Jordan and Lenschow, 2000). The political perspective on EPI is focussed in particular on the political will of different political actors to integrate environmental demands into distinct policies (Schout and Jordan, 2008). Finally, a cognitive perspective has become increasingly relevant in recent years as a means of exploring factors and processes that lead to or hinder environmental policy integration (Hertin and Berkhout, 2003; Nilsson, 2005; Nilsson and Eckerberg, 2007). The underlying idea of this cognitive perspective is that policy interests are often embedded in a frame of reference (or sets of ideas), “which pre-structures the thinking within a policy sector” (cf. Lenschow, 2002, 17). These frames can correspond to predominant paradigms of particular sectors (Russel and Jordan, 2009).

This paper is based on Entman’s (1993) general definition of frames as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (53). More specifically, we follow Schön and Rein (1995, 23) who describe frames as “underlying structures of belief, perception and appreciation” (Schön and Rein, 1995, 23). These frames are not “free floating” but “grounded in the institutions that sponsor them,

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