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New modes of governance in Bavaria's alpine forests: The 'Mountain Forest Initiative' at work[☆]

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ABSTRACT

There is much talk about the need for stakeholder participation and inter-sectoral coordination in forest policy and management. But there is limited understanding about forest agencies' role in the adoption of new governance modes and their contribution to policy delivery. By drawing on a qualitative implementation study of Bavaria's Mountain Forest Initiative in locally-operating forest agencies, the present paper addresses these gaps. The government wants them to establish collaborative arrangements with various stakeholders to facilitate measures for adaptation to climate change in private forests. The cross-case comparison provides detailed empirical insights into distinct sets of activities for making the initiative 'work'. Stakeholder participation gains a firm basis at the local level if forest agencies develop interest in and generate ownership of prospects for collaborative planning, and tailor these to their needs. The study suggests, however, that involvement of local stakeholders in forest planning is not necessarily instrumental for delivery of effective policies, as reliance on the local level entails the risk that the broader picture of initial policy goals gets lost.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the state of Bavaria in Germany has begun experimenting with new modes of governance in forest policy. In a number of pilot programmes, the early involvement of different stakeholders is considered crucial to achieving a number of intended objectives, including the protection of biodiversity, avoidance of natural hazards, and adaptation to climate change. The 'Mountain Forest Initiative' (*Bergwaldoffensive*) exemplifies this move. It was launched in 2009 by the Bavarian Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry to restore the protective function of the vulnerable alpine forest in light of climate change, and is ongoing until 2014. To achieve this goal and create a general sense of ownership in the process, the Mountain Forest Initiative seeks the involvement of different stakeholders at the local level (e.g., private forest owners, land-use related authorities, hunters, nature conservationists, and tourism associations).

Traditionally, governance refers to the hierarchical relationship between government actors as 'subjects of control', and private or civil society actors as 'objects of control'. The literature on new modes of governance, by contrast, depicts the self-governance of non-state actors, as well as a broader spectrum of institutionalised arrangements (or modes) for 'plurilateral' coordination, including closed and open co-governance in which state actors participate as one type of actor among many (Kooiman, 2003; Mayntz, 2003). The notion of governance

modes thus refers to the 'extent to which governmental and/or non-governmental actors are involved in governing'; i.e. determining who gets what, where, when and how in society (Arnouts et al., 2012: 44; Howlett et al., 2009). In forest policy, the new modes of governance, which range from the international to the local level and include multiple actors and sectors, aim at decentralisation, the introduction and diffusion of market-based instruments, and use of participatory approaches (Secco et al., 2013). Interaction, shared responsibility and inter-sectoral coordination are considered constituting elements of these new governance modes in forestry (Hogl et al., 2008a,b; Secco et al., 2011), thus mirroring trends in the governance of natural resources, namely: (a) the involvement of an enlarged set of actors in order to define and ensure the effectiveness of key measures, and (b) 'procedures to choose and foster desirable states as needed' (Newig and Kvarda, 2012: 29).

The problem with participatory approaches in forestry, however, is in the rhetoric: more participation is seen as 'better' participation, while actual practice tells a different story (Hogl et al., 2008b; Kaeser et al., 2012). These approaches provide 'more opportunities and access to a broader range of stakeholders who may gain increased and legitimate influence on decision-making ... [But] the pre-existing structures, traditional institutions, actor networks and the entrenched patterns of power distribution remain central to the explanation of governance processes, as well as these processes' policy outputs, impacts, and outcomes' (Hogl et al., 2008a: 26–7). Normative accounts of stakeholder participation in forestry thus do not fit reality. The inclusion of different actors in policy processes is organised somehow and does not stand alone outside established settings (van der Arend and Behagel, 2011). Current approaches to the analysis of changing governance modes in

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forest policy and management support this argument of Hogl et al. (2008a) (e.g., Arnouts et al., 2012; Secco et al., 2011; Winkel and Sotirov, 2011), but are of limited use in examining its implication: stakeholder participation in forestry needs to be studied as a process rather than taken as given.

This paper uses recent theories of the new institutionalism in organisation sociology to study how the process of stakeholder participation unfolds at the local level of public forest agencies and contributes to the delivery of effective policies. This focus addresses two research gaps. Firstly, the role of public forest agencies in new modes of governance needs to be clarified. There is general understanding that their mandate has expanded to the management of forests for multiple purposes, which requires both interactions with a wide range of stakeholders and interests, and skills in conflict resolution and inter-sectoral coordination (Cashore et al., 2010; Humphreys, 2004; Krott and Stevanov, 2008). But it is less clear how administrations and their staff adopt participatory approaches to meet this challenge. As in many other countries, Bavaria's forest sector is characterised by 'sticky institutions' (Buttoud et al., 2011; Raitio, 2011), i.e., a traditionally closed, government-centred, expert-based and subsidy-reliant mode of policy planning (Franz, 2010; Schanz, 2002; Suda, 2002). The second contribution relates to the ongoing discussion about the 'causal linkages' between the adoption of participatory approaches in natural resource management and their consequences within a given system (Rauschmeyer et al., 2009). Findings from a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of participatory approaches in different fields of environmental policy reveal that networks are opened up for green preferences, and the acceptance of public decisions has increased, which in turn facilitates implementation. However, 'which contextual or process factors make best-practice cases good enough in order to successfully learn from them' is not well understood (Newig and Fritsch, 2009: 210).

The paper is structured as follows: the next section describes the background and specific characteristics of the Mountain Forest Initiative to provide the empirical baseline for development of the analytical framework. The framework explores the sociological notion of 'institutional work'. With this, attention is focused on the distinct activities aimed at making the Mountain Forest Initiative 'work'. The cross-case comparison provides detailed empirical insights into the implementation of participatory approaches by locally-operated public forest agencies in Bavaria's south. Overall, the forest agencies do a great deal in terms of garnering support for their role in protecting the vulnerable Alpine forests, but they show limited interest in questioning their prevalence in forest planning. This may be both instrumental and detrimental for effective policy delivery. The paper concludes by first discussing the conditions for successful implementation of participation in forest governance on a local level, and then detailing the lessons learned as to the salience of administrative behaviour for the effectiveness of participatory approaches in forestry.

2. The Mountain Forest Initiative

Bavaria's Mountain Forest Initiative seeks to facilitate adaptation to climate change through silvicultural measures, rejuvenation of tree stands, and re-creation of protective areas in privately-owned and community forests. Bavaria's alpine forest cover is about 250,000 ha, 150,000 ha of which are categorised as protection forests. As indicated in Table 1, the initiative addresses 43% of these forests, covering roughly 100,000 ha. The need to adapt alpine forest stands according to the consequences of climate change is undisputed (e.g., Agrawalla, 2007). Sustained stability of these forests is a major concern of Bavaria's six forest agencies in the alpine area, all of which are involved in the Mountain Forest Initiative. The initiative initially provided the agencies with a spending volume of 7.5 million euros for adaptation projects – to be located mainly in the endangered areas of the protective forests – and additional personnel for the newly-assigned role of project management. The spending volume increased due to the initiative's prolongation beyond the original time frame of 2009–12.

Table 1

Comparison of distribution of forest ownership in Bavaria.

	Distribution of forest ownership	
	Total Bavaria	Alpine Region
Federal forests	2%	2%
State forests	30%	55%
Community forests	10%	5%
Private-owned forests	58%	38%
Thereof protection forest (subject to the regulations of the Bavarian Forest Law (BayWaldG))		66%

In principle, there are two main strategies to sustain the protective function of alpine forest stands in the long term. The first of these strategies is forest conversion, in particular the promotion of the three main species (spruce, fir and beech) in a site-adapted mixture. A second strategy involves forest management in order to rejuvenate overage stocks or to improve the age and species distribution of individual stocks (Kölling et al., 2010). The success of both strategies depends on effective game management. The deer population in the alpine region should allow young trees to grow without the need for additional measures such as fences or individual plant protection, as are often used in the lowlands. In steep terrains, such technical measures are very expensive and difficult to maintain (Süß, 2011). But foresters and hunters may differ extremely in their opinions on how many deer a forest can support before additional measures are needed for its rejuvenation. The Mountain Forest Initiative was not tailored specifically to the conflict between forestry and hunting. But as shown below, it was initially seen as a welcomed opportunity to address this age-old conflict.

The ministerial guidelines for the local-level operation of the Mountain Forest Initiative envision the creation of collaborative arrangements to support local forest agencies in their concern for the endangered alpine forest stands.¹ The guidelines encourage the establishment of multi-stakeholder-based mountain forest steering committees and project-based forums to advise forest agencies in the definition, selection and implementation of measures. Through these guidelines, interest accommodation, the exchange of views and perspectives, and the creation of ownership and acceptance are supposed to take shape. Distinguishing it from other programmes within Bavaria's forest policy, the Mountain Forest Initiative funds projects within distinct areas; i.e., projects always entail more than one forest owner. Through contracts, funding eligibility is made contingent upon forest owners' commitment to help ensure the success of the funded measure. The guidelines further indicate the availability of funds for project management including costs for personnel and training, facilitation, and mediation, and emphasise the forest agencies' central role in drafting plans, consulting with interested groups, and communicating with forest owners.

The Mountain Forest Initiative's guidelines thus provide preliminary answers on 'who' should be involved, and 'how' that involvement should be managed (Shannon, 2006). However, as experience with collaborative resource management in private-owned forests is scarce, details on how to collaboratively engage in forest planning in the Bavarian alpine region are not specified. The initiative compensates for this lack with project management training in a complementary INTERREG project.² In these seven-day trainings, participants learn how to

¹ To prepare for the implementation of this pilot project, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry initiated a working group with participants of the forest offices in the alpine region. The working group was expected to (a) provide recommendations for the practical implementation of (i.e., the guidelines for) the Mountain Forest Initiative, and (b) make suggestions on how to adjust forest subsidies according to the intentions of the Mountain Forest Initiative. Whereas the guidelines were decided upon in 2008, changes in regulations for related forest subsidies have been published in 2010.

² The INTERREG project 'Protection forest platforms and -forums in Tyrol and Bavaria' started in January 2009 and was concluded in May 2012. It aimed at supporting the formation and establishment of participatory structures and the necessary competences to work within them in Bavarian forest agencies of the alpine region. Beyond such service provision, the INTERREG project allowed for field research on the implementation of the forest initiative at the local level and granted access to interview partners.

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