

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

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Case Study Name:	Participation and Protected Areas Governance: the Impact of Changing Influence of Local Authorities on the Conservation of the Białowieża Primeval Forest, Poland		
Author:	Niedziałkowski, K., J. Paavola, and B. Jędrzejewska		
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Region:	Europe		
Country:	Poland		
Ecosystem Type:	Forest		
Social Characteristics:	Other (local community)		
Scale of Study:	Protected area		
Resource Type:	Protected area		
Type of Initiative:	Research-driven project		
Community Based Work:	resource management, conservation		

Keywords:	Białowieża; biodiversity conservation; governance; national park; participation; Poland; protected areas
Summary:	According to the new conservation paradigm, protected areas should contribute to the socioeconomic development of host communities, and the latter ought to be included in participatory decision making concerning these areas. However, the understanding of participation is ambiguous and there are at least three major approaches, which may have different impacts on the governance of protected areas. We examine the case of the Białowieża Primeval Forest in order to trace the effectiveness of changing modes of participation as well as to discuss the limitations and problems of public participation. Between 1918 and 2010, the role of local authorities changed from no influence to limited control over decision making regarding designation and enlargement of the Białowieża National Park (BNP). As a result of these changes, attempts to enlarge the BNP over the whole forest were undermined. The evidence shows that power relations and instrumental reasons constituted the main drivers of the changing participation pattern with deliberative rationale lacking. As a result, the conservation goals were only partially achieved. We argue that when interests are clearly conflicting and win-win solutions are difficult to reach, room for constructive participation may be limited. In these circumstances, public involvement may turn into yet another venue for a power play between actors with vested interests, without bringing gains in legitimacy or new policy options. This is especially the case for countries with a relatively short democratic record where the government lacks the consistency and capacity to steer the process over the longer term.