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*Parks, people, planet:  
inspiring solutions*

## **Governance and procedural rights: The case of the Białowieża Forest conflict**

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# Białowieża Forest

- Located on the Polish-Belorussian border, in economically underdeveloped region
- The only so large **near-natural lowland temperate** forest in Europe that has never been cut
- Structures and species characteristic for **naturally dynamic forest**
- Reference area for biodiversity conservation
- **Only 16 % protected** as National Park (NP), the rest managed according to Sustainable Forest Management principles
- **Subject to over 20 years of conflict:** present management or more protection?



# Local protests vs idea of NP enlargement

## LOCALS AND FORESTERS

- Enlargement of National Park (NP) would cause **unbearable costs** for local communities
- The Forest is best **protected through forestry** measures
- Foresters are **obliged by legislation** to manage the Forest



## SCIENTISTS ENVIRONMENTALISTS

- The Forest is **loosing its unique biodiversity** due to forestry
- It should be protected as **NP**
- The **costs** can be **balanced by benefits** (e.g. tourism)

## THE GOVERNMENT

- We are **obliged by international legislation** to protect **unique biodiversity** of the Forest

# Negotiations instead of public participation

**Deliberation** (quality of a dialogue)

Communication and decision making through argument and dialogue

**Open?** Restricted participation; lack of info about possibility to take part; foresters and environmentalists taking over the process

**Accountable?** Unclear procedures; lack of trust

**Reciprocal?** Two-way dialogue, but not inclusive

**Integer?** Little respect to local people needs and fears; little commitment of the Government to recognise these needs and fears

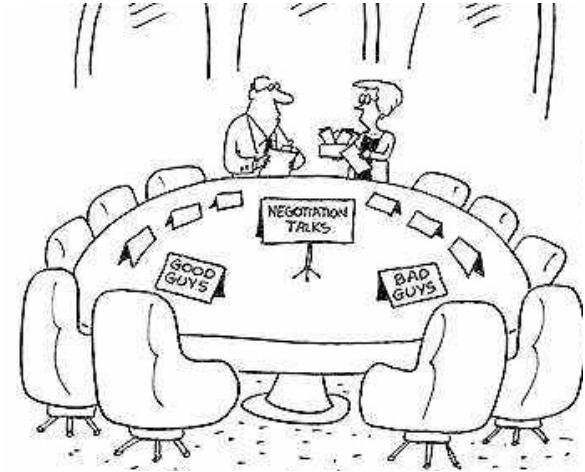
**Involving learning?** Deepening conflict instead of building understanding

(Hajer and Veersteg 2005)



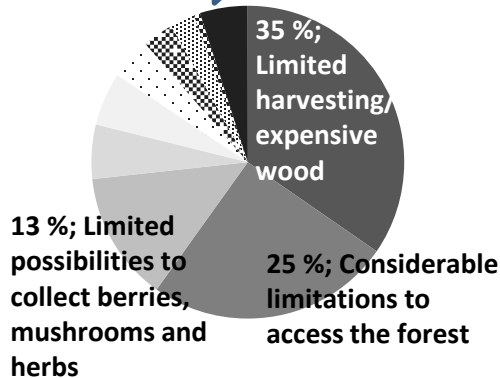
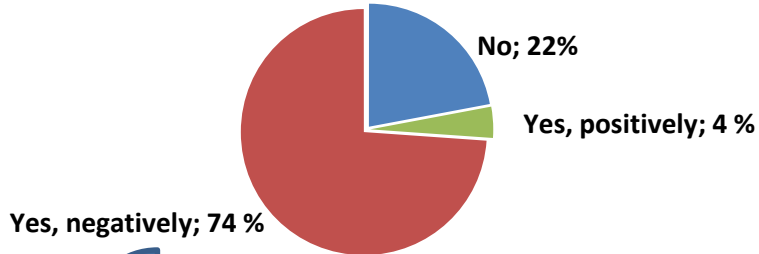
# Why? The process

- Legacies of top-down governance
  - ✓ Lack of established mechanisms for engaging the public
  - ✓ Extremely low trust (“Locals” vs “People from outside”; Accusations; Misinformation)
- Local needs and fears
  - ✓ Lack of concrete information (e.g. firewood; knowledge on NP)

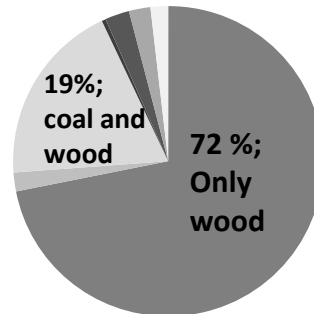


# Local needs, knowledge & fears

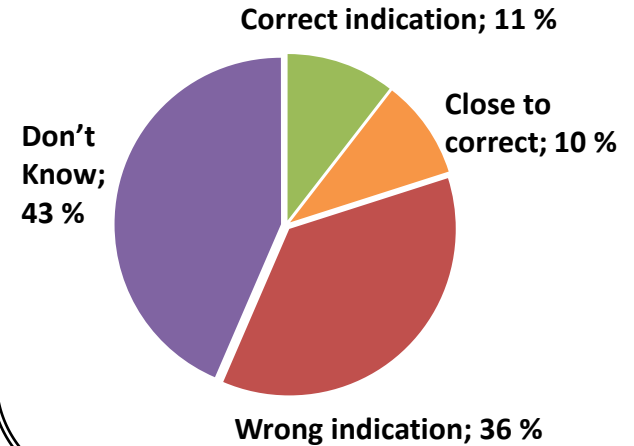
Would enlarging the national park influence the way you presently benefit from forest?



How do you heat your house?

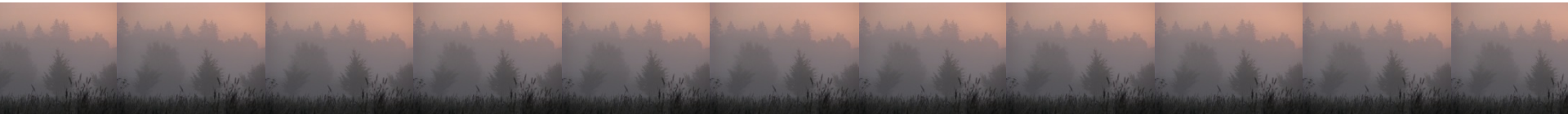


What share of the Białowieża Forest is a national park?



# What was missing?

- Transparency and trust
- Clear information about conservation rules – why, where, what and how
- Concrete information on potential costs and benefits



# What would be needed?

- Commitment to long term process of trust building
- Well-designed and facilitated process of participation
- Involvement of the NP in the education of/information for local people
- Cost-benefit analysis; creation and testing of alternative scenarios
- National policies to support rural development in the transition period.
- Adaptive management...





# Thank you!

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