

## Publication

### Letting the Political Dimension of Participation in River Restoration have its Space

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This paper explores how experts involved in river restoration projects in Switzerland consider and implement public participation. It reflects on the consequences that their considerations can have for the politicizing potential of participation to emerge and be explored. In this regard, many scholars express the concern that, despite a growing participatory trend, the public is given no voice to express disagreement on environmental matters and that controversies are often neglected. Following this logic, consensus building around the initial proposed plan is often favored, and alternative solutions are excluded. Our goal is to identify and propose moments and practical actions that would permit practitioners to explore the politicization of participation. Based on an analysis of expert discourses in a national survey and three case studies of river restoration projects, we identify three common patterns of the way in which the depoliticization of participation operates and its potential negative consequences. The first pattern highlights the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion when any form of participation is implemented. Second, expertise is often put forward as an unquestionable truth in the decisional process of a project. Third, experts often favor a consensus-building model that negates conflicts. We propose ways for practitioners to acknowledge and integrate the political dimension of participation, discussing why such a move is not detrimental to the goals of river restoration. We argue that a consideration of politicizing moments of participation is a way to revitalize public engagement in river restoration.

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