

Manuel John		
Affiliation	Chair of Sustainability Governance & ConFoBi RTG, University of Freiburg	
Session Chair		
Presentations	Session 6.1	<i>Politics of knowledge in forest management.</i>

Abstract Session 6.1 – Reconstructing Retention Forestry: The role of professional epistemologies in forest biodiversity research.

Studying forest biodiversity is an interdisciplinary endeavor – not least because the majority of earth’s forests are currently under some sort of management. Far from being the study of natural phenomena exclusively, forest biodiversity research often seeks to further efforts for the maintenance of biodiversity under conditions of the continued use of forests, which includes considering the different ways humans manage or otherwise interact with them.

Retention Forestry is an example of a management approach which attempts to reconcile biodiversity conservation with the economic use of forests, primarily for timber production. From its inception in the pacific Northwest of the US more than thirty years ago, Retention Forestry has been implemented in many regions all over the globe today. At the same time, a growing body of scientific literature has developed, aiming to define and substantiate this approach, to test the effectiveness of measures like the retention of live and dead trees, and to develop it further.

Drawing on insights from Science and Technology Studies, this presentation will retrace the scientific debate around Retention Forestry based on the existing literature. By focusing on the distinct epistemologies of the different fields involved (including specific research foci, theoretical frameworks or methods), it will be possible to highlight how disciplines like forest science or conservation ecology have shaped in different ways how forests are “known”, and potentially also managed and reshaped, as the object of Retention Forestry. Together with a focus on regional particularities, like differences in management regimes, this will help to identify both a common core of Retention Forestry as a scientifically backed-up management practice, and the heterogeneities that characterize it. Understanding these roots will allow for making better sense of Retention Forestry as a current attempt to bridge different understandings of what forests are and should be.