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Research between conflicts of interest in a small German municipality

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Lake eutrophication is a traditional topic in hydrology which attracts the attention of scientists all over the world to date. However, in single cases of lakes experiencing severe consequences of nutrient overloads (e.g., toxic algae blooms, loss of species richness…) also a non-scientific public arouses interest in processes behind and reasons for these phenomena. This interest results from the various effects of eutrophication on the anthropogenic use of the lake, such as loss of the lake′s recreational value, potential health impairments from contact with lake water, changes of the ecological/esthetical status, etc. We present our manifold experiences in communicating with different actors who are or at least feel affected by our research to identify sources for elevated phosphorus loads to Lake Arendsee in Germany. Among those are supporters and opponents of restoration plans as there are for example

• representatives of different public authorities,
• inhabitants of local communities making their income from tourism around the lake,
• farmers,
• fishermen,
• etc.

We describe different conflicts of interest arising from this situation and describe problems we had interacting with single actors. A citizen-science action was initiated which increased both, the research output and the awareness of the problem within the general local public. We conclude that even in small municipalities a complex structure of stakeholders may develop who might act in unpredictable ways to achieve their personal or political goals.