

WP1 The cultural meaning of hunting Ketil Skogen

Work package overview

Hunting is an extremely important mode of human-nature interaction. How people think about this interaction is closely linked to culture patterns and value systems. To address hunting merely as a relationship between humans and animals, and manage it accordingly, will miss essential dimensions of hunting as a social practice. In spite of this, hunting in modern societies has received limited attention from the social sciences. One of the objectives of HUNT has been to remedy this situation.

We have used qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups and observation) because we were investigating *meaning in context*, something which is difficult to do with quantitative methods, and because pre-existing knowledge was limited. We needed the flexibility and openness of qualitative methods to capture the unexpected and to probe cultural meaning with sufficient depth. We adopted a grounded approach in the sense that we did not presuppose a fixed theoretical framework. This has generated a number of analytical paths or “sub-projects” that are not easily summarized under a few headings. Because of this diversity we can only provide selected examples here. We encourage interested readers to follow the website and refer to publications (see list below) as they are made available online.



1.1 Moralities of hunting

Anke Fischer

Background

Talking about hunting often seems to mean talking about morality: much of the public debate over hunting revolves around perceptions of the moral acceptability of different types of and approaches to hunting. But what exactly is seen as moral and what is seen as a legitimate (or illegitimate) way of hunting?

Key findings

Based on interview material from Europe and Africa, we identified the attributes that are drawn on to legitimise hunting – or to undermine its legitimacy – including characteristics of the hunted animal, hunting techniques and approaches, and motivations. The latter factor in particular (i.e. ideas of legitimate and illegitimate motivations) seemed to underpin a large part of our informants’ discourses. We identified what may be termed a *moral hierarchy*, where motivations such as recreation and excitement are accepted by hunters and

non-hunters, but only if the *moral imperatives of meat consumption or responsible population control* are fulfilled. Differing evaluations of hunting practices (e.g., between hunters and non-hunters) were often not due to fundamental disagreements on moral values, but lay in the question to what degree these were observed in real life.

Conclusions

We conclude that all ideas about the legitimacy of hunting are embedded in societal discourses, and should be interpreted in this context. Our analysis also suggests that there might be more overlap between the argumentations of hunters, non-hunters and even some animal rights activists than commonly thought. Recurrence to common, moral principles that capture a consensus on what constitutes legitimate hunting (and what does not) could be used as a starting point to manage disputes between hunters and other actors in wildlife management.

HUNT is an interdisciplinary international research project, financed by the EU’s 7th Framework program, looking into the wider meaning of hunting in the 21st century



<http://fp7hunt.net>

Further reading:

Lowassa, A., D. Tadie & A. Fischer (in press). On the role of women in bushmeat hunting – insights from Tanzania and Ethiopia. *Journal of Rural Studies*.

A summary of research findings from the Scottish case study, <http://fp7hunt.net/Portals/HUNT/Reports/Scottish%20research%20briefings.pdf>

Borgen, O. Å. 2010. *Ungdom på jakt. Kulturelle mønstre i utmarka (Young hunters. Backcountry cultural patterns)*. MA thesis, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology, <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-26608>

Kveseth, C. M. 2009. *Jakten på en identite. (Hunting for identity)*. MA thesis, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology, <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-24006>

Seeberg, A. B. 2009. *Det menneskelige dyret eller det dyriske mennesket. En studie av dyreverneres syn på jakt og menneskets moralske forhold til dyr (The human animal or the wild human. A study of animal rights activists and their views on hunting)*. MA thesis, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology, <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-24446>

Skau fjord, P. 2010. *Den "hellige" jakta. En sosiologisk studie av jakt og fellesskap i Aurskog-Høland (The "sacred" hunting. A sociological study of hunting and community in Aurskog-Høland)*. MA thesis, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology, <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-26173>

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