

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.



1.2 Hunting as stewardship

Anke Fischer

Background

Debates over hunting also revolve around the issue of hunters’ relationships with wildlife and the land where they hunt. Do hunters merely seek excitement and recreation, or are they in fact responsible conservationists? We studied how hunters in Norway, Scotland, Croatia and Spain understand their role in nature, and how they relate to conservation.

Key findings

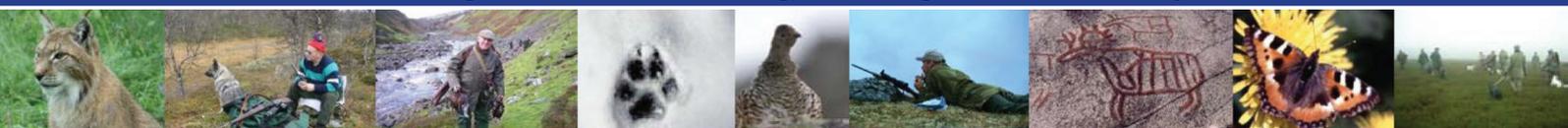
For many hunters, the idea of *caring for* the wildlife and the land is crucial to their understanding of what hunting is about. The basic premise is that due to long-term human interactions with nature, nature also needs to be managed – not only for people’s sake, but to maintain ecosystems. This engagement with wild animals is thought of as part of a deeper unity with nature, which means being *part of* nature in

physical sense. Hunters claim that if humans are to be part of nature, we must also engage with it (e.g. as predators), but also as caretakers or stewards.

Conclusions

The idea of hunters as stewards contributes to the moral justification of hunting and, importantly, underpins a symbolic appropriation of the land where hunting takes place. Despite differences, hunters and conservationists share many thoughts and values. The idea of stewardship that many hunters nourish, points to potential grounds for increased cooperation between the two groups and could provide a starting point for building a consensus that might also prove valuable for reconciling apparently conflicting moralities from a management viewpoint.

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>

Skaufjord, 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>

For more information contact:

Justin Irvine (Justin.Irvine@hutton.ac.uk)



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