

Analysing practices related to forest road landscapes

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The construction of forest roads has been a significant phenomenon in the Finnish forest environment and from the standpoint of the people who move in the forests. Today most forest areas are located within only a short distance from the nearest road. Forest roads have been built mainly for forestry, but people use them for various purposes, most often in connection with recreation activities. In the doctoral dissertation that I am preparing, my purpose is to examine forest road landscapes and people's engagements with them on a local level. The theoretical background of the study is based on landscape research and cultural geography. Questions of materiality, practices, nature-culture hybrids, embodiment and discourses are particularly highlighted.

I argue that integrative planning of forest roads and forest areas requires a good understanding of various practices related to them. It is important to link together physical environments, human and nonhuman actors, people's activities, experiences and aims as well as social relations, public discussion, institutional contexts and power and justice issues. Practices that connect people with forest roads are diverse. Activities, such as forestry work, berry-picking, hunting, fishing, walking, hiking, travelling to a summer cottage or just passing through an area, often involve different environments and different ways of moving, acting and experiencing. Practices are attached to specific places, they function at different spatial and temporal scales and they are also initiated and sustained in various ways.

My case study is set in the municipality of Nurmes in North Karelia, Finland. I examine changing landscapes and expanding road network with the help of fieldwork, maps and geographic datasets. I use thematic interviews and people's writings to study different uses of forest roads, related activities and landscape experiences. Through newspaper writings and planning documents I focus on public debate and planning processes.