

Activity Theory Approach for Studying and Developing Forest Management Planning in Finland

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Abstract

The status of forestry in Finland's national economy is significant. Changes in society over time have induced the need to modify the aims of forestry management from the traditional orientation of wood-production to one of multiple objectives. We assume that a customer-oriented planning service is a fruitful solution for increasing the efficiency of planning.

To support the development of forest management planning our study focuses on the intertwined practices of present forest management planning and counselling related to it. Cultural-historical activity theory builds up the framework to conceptualise forest planning activities. The data consists of nineteen semi-structured in-depth interviews from professional forest planners.

A planning activity model was constructed in the study with emphasise on the contradictions inherent in it. The main tension was the contradiction located in the object of the planning work. The forest and the forest owner are both objects in the planner's work. The planner determines the needs of the forest but (s)he also needs to counsel and motivate the owner so that the plan is realised. The contradiction was clearly seen in competition for the planner's time.

As a conclusion directions for development are described: (1) Forest data collection, maintenance and counselling could form an entity, which is society-driven and can be called a forest informing system; and (2) Planning could be developed towards genuinely customer-oriented, consultative planning activity.

These directions are challenging forest planning research to make deeper assessments of the properties of an informing activity to be meaningful from the perspectives of the planner, the forest owner, other forestry institutions and wider society. Similarly, an essential research question is to clarify the fundamentals of genuinely customer-oriented, consultative planning. Another challenge is to fulfill the aims of the multiple objectives of forestry instead of giving priority to wood production.