

SOCIAL CONFLICT AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT: THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICTING SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE

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Abstract

Social and demographic change caused by the migration of urban residents to rural and peri-urban areas in the Netherlands has resulted in significant changes in social representations of nature (cf. Halfacree, 1993). As a result, new discussions emerged over the management of National Parks, forests and rural areas, resulting in several conflicts between Park managers and local residents. To gain understanding of such conflicts, this study focuses on National Park The Drents Friese Wold, a typical Dutch National Park consisting of an attractive mix of forests, moorland, and meadows. Official aim of the Park is to protect biodiversity in combination with facilitating recreational opportunities for urban recreationist and local residents.

Related to the import of retired, but highly educated urban people, a conflict between park managers and local residents emerged in 2004. Local residents raised a protest group and collected 7000 signatures to protest against the management of the Park. After two years of conflicts, the protest group and park managers signed a covenant on the management of the Park. Based on a longitudinal study using media analyses and focusgroups, this paper focuses on the diverging use of social representation in discourses on the management of the park. Which social representations of nature use residents and managers to convince the general public and each other of their view on management of the Park? Moreover, have these representations changed between the initial, quite heated phase of the conflict and the signing of the covenant? This question especially focuses on whether stakeholder involvement and the signing of the covenant resulted in a better understanding of each other's view and the adjustment of each representations of nature. Or has stakeholder involvement and the signing of the covenant merely a strategic compromise based on the exchange of interests?

Key Words

national parks, attitudes, local residents, social representations, conflicts