

Identity and Environmental Governance: Institutional Change in Contemporary British Forestry Policy and Practice

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Abstract

Institutional change in contemporary British public sector forestry was examined with particular reference to issues of institutional and individual identity, drawing on the internal perspectives of staff working for the Forestry Commission (FC). The research was based on a grounded theory approach using a combination of multi-site participant observation of the FC across GB and long semi-structured interviews. The research revealed the ‘storyline’ of social forestry as a symptom that the identity of the FC had become problematised, resulting in a debate about the future of forestry among a group of people for whom the FC and its work were both important and meaningful. The perception that the relationship between the FC and its setting of action had become destabilised led actors to initiate different kinds of work on the institutional self of the FC, and on the selves of important ‘others’ perceived to be able to confer legitimacy. A ‘re-constituted’ narrative of self is developed on the basis of internal oral narratives of important events in the history of the FC, identifying the institutional self-identity which had become problematised and the identity structures with which the FC was now ‘confronting’ its present.

The research shows how the structures of the FC’s self were brought into play, challenged and transformed in negotiation with a very mobile setting of action in the early 2000s, explaining what challenges and opportunities the FC was responding to, and the consequences for the identities of the institution and of its staff.