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Private woodland owners' perspectives on multifunctionality in English woodlands

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A B S T R A C T

Increasing emphasis is being placed in forest policies to deliver public goods such as biodiversity, recreation, landscape and carbon sequestration, alongside timber production. In light of this, it is important to understand how woodland owners themselves perceive their role in delivering these multiple benefits. With up to 80% of woodland in some areas in England in private ownership, and with an increasing number of owners with non-financial objectives for their woodland, the private sector may offer opportunities for delivering public goods. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of private woodland owners to multifunctional woodland management in three study areas in England: Cornwall, the Lake District and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Q Methodology was used to identify four perspectives of woodland ownership and management, which can be described as: the Hobby Conservationist; the Individualist; the Custodian and the Multifunctional Owner. The implications of the findings for forest policy are discussed.

1. Introduction

The last 15 years have seen an increasing interest among policy makers in the social and environmental benefits of woodlands and forests, in addition to their role of timber production. The reasons for this shift in focus are varied, but it is widely agreed that rural space in general in Western Europe has undergone a complex restructuring since the mid-1980s (see, for example, Kristensen et al., 2004). The countryside is increasingly seen as a place of consumption and protection, as well as production (Slee, 2005; Holmes, 2006) with farmers and other primary producers (such as foresters) seeking new ways of making a living (Ilbery, 1998), together with an increase in 'hobby farming' and amenity purchases of woodland. The multiple stimuli for these changes include changes in landownership and land owner preferences, the drive for sustainability as a result of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the changes in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that decoupled subsidies from production, the high cost of maintaining agricultural subsidies, public pressure, the WTO negotiations and an increase in environmental regulation in EU policy (Bowler and Ilbery, 1999). This new rural context has been conceptualised by a number of writers (Bowler, 1992; Marsden et al., 1993; Shucksmith, 1993; Marsden, 1995; Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Marsden, 1998; Mather, 2001; Mather et al., 2006; Wilson 2007) who suggested that agricultural and rural space has been in a transition from productivism to post-productivism with its associated increased emphasis on multifunctionality. More recently, concerns over the ability of the current agricultural system to provide a reliable supply of food in the future (due to the impacts of climate change and increased demand for food) raises questions whether we need to be looking towards a neoproductivist agricultural regime, putting primary production back as the focus.

The key elements of multifunctionality are the existence of multiple commodity and non-commodity outputs that are jointly produced by agriculture—and the fact that some of the non-commodity outputs exhibit the characteristics of externalities or public goods when markets for these goods do not exist or function poorly. Interest in forest multifunctionality as a phenomenon arises in part because new styles of forest owner may be providing public benefits inadvertently as a result of their private choices and preferences. Owner-motivated management styles may generate wide-ranging spillover benefits for the wider public, although owners may choose to make only some of these public goods 'available'.

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The triggers for the evolution of post-productivism differ for agriculture and forestry. The major driver for the transition to post-productivism in farming was the cost of agricultural support, as well as low returns to mainstream farming, overproduction and surpluses. However, within forestry in England the main issue was a fall in timber prices between 1991 and 2006 resulting in many forest owners harvesting well below their sustainable increment (Slee et al., 2006), as well as social injustice (e.g. tax incentives for the wealthy), and the increase in woodland planting on agricultural land under the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. At the same time, forests were becoming emblematic of environmental issues globally (Mather et al., 2006) with concerns over deforestation and the implications of this for climate change and biodiversity loss. Forests have been given an increasingly important role in the context of sustainable development, with guidelines for sustainable forest management put forward in the Statement of Forest Principles at Rio, leading to the implementation of European national forest policies that highlight the importance of sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of woodlands.

The most recent English forest strategy (Defra, 2007) aims to provide a resource of trees and woods that can deliver environmental, social and economic benefits both now and in the future, ensuring that those woodlands are resilient to the effects of climate change. The policy highlights the environmental importance of woodlands in terms of water, soil, air, biodiversity and landscapes, as well as their cultural and amenity value. State incentive schemes have also been revised to reflect the shift in policy emphasis. The new English Woodland Grant Scheme (launched in 2005) focuses on the wider issues of biodiversity and recreation, whereas earlier schemes (such as the Forestry Grant Scheme) stipulated that timber production had to be the primary objective. Other measures for ensuring sustainable forest management have also been implemented, such as the UK Forestry Standard, the UK indicators of sustainable forestry and monitoring of the sustainability of wood products through certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), which is recognised by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

A number of researchers argue that the shift in emphasis towards "post-productivism" or "multifunctionality" calls for a new theoretical understanding which is more integrated and holistic, combining social and environmental values with those of production. However, these new conceptual frameworks of rural space often focus mainly on exogenous factors of agricultural change (for example, policy changes, the political economy framework, farmers' economic adjustments to external forces) (Burton and Wilson, 2006). Agency-related endogenous characteristics, such as attitudes, perceptions, behaviour and identities, are often overlooked. In this context, Burton and Wilson (2006, p. 96) argue that "… most research on post-productivism has taken a top-down political economy-oriented approach, and, as a consequence, many of the traditional features of post-productivist enquiry have focused on specific actor groups (e.g. policy makers) or larger structural entities (e.g. 'the state') to the neglect of individuals and their action." Wilson (2001) further notes that the dominant political economy discourse has resulted in landowners often being viewed as "responding almost entirely to *outside* forces, with little acknowledgement of possible changes from *within*" (pp. 85–86, original emphasis).

Indeed, a number of studies (for example, Kline et al., 2000a; Pregernig, 2001; Wiersum et al., 2005; Church and Ravenscroft, 2008; Rodriguez-Vicente and Marey-Perez, 2009) suggest that in order to design effective policies and support mechanisms (including extension services) for private forest owners, policy makers need to understand the motivations, attitudes and objectives of private woodland owners with policies that most align with owner goals most likely to succeed. Dhubhain et al. (2006) agree: "knowledge of forest owners' values, attitudes and ownership objectives is … of crucial importance in understanding and predicting forestry behaviour in private woodlands" (p. 72). However, very little is known about the attitudes and perceptions of English forest owners to the multifunctional use of their woodlands. Studies tend to focus on owners' attitudes towards public access (see, for example, Sime et al., 1993; Church et al., 2005; Church and Ravenscroft, 2008) and their response to public policy initiatives.

To address this, the study described in this paper takes a broader approach, exploring owner attitudes to a range of public benefits, along with their perceived constraints on multifunctional woodland management and attitudes towards incentive schemes and state support. Q Methodology is employed to explore owners' perspectives on the multifunctional use of their woodlands in three study areas in England: the Lake District, the High Weald AONB and Cornwall. The following section reviews the literature on private woodland owner attitudes and motivations. A full description of Q Methodology is given in Section 3, the results of which are presented in Section 4. The multifunctional objectives of private woodland owners and their possible responses to policy instruments, which seek to encourage provision of a range of public benefits, are discussed in Section 5.

2. Attitudes and motivations of private woodland owners

Woodland owners are not a homogeneous group. It is apparent that over the past 50 years there has been a change in the nature of forest ownership, with an increase in non-traditional, non-farming woodland owners (Hogl et al., 2005; Schraml and Memmler, 2005). The high prices often paid for rural land and woodland in particular, reflect amenity-based consumptive values rather than productive values, with new owners likely to be motivated increasingly by environmental and recreational objectives (Erickson et al., 2002; Hodgdon and Tyrrell, 2003; Hogl et al., 2005; Kendra and Hull, 2005; Rickenbach and Kittredge, 2009; Urquhart et al., 2010). These new owners tend to share a number of characteristics, such as they are likely to rely on other sources of income, rather than their forest (Ripatti, 1996; Kvarda, 2004; Wiersum et al., 2005; Niskanen et al., 2007). They are likely to live in or come from more urban areas (Rickenbach et al., 2005), may live some distance from their woodland (Karpinnen, 1998; Toivonen et al., 2005), are growing older (Force and Lee, 1991; Broderick et al., 1994; Ripatti, 1996; Johnson et al., 1997; Karpinnen, 1998; Ripatti, 2000; Kittredge, 2004), own smaller woodlands (Kittredge, 2004), are well educated (Force and Lee, 1991; Broderick et al., 1994) and more affluent (Broderick et al., 1994; Johnson et al., 1997; Kluender and Walkingstick, 2000).

In order to understand the heterogeneous nature of woodland ownership, a number of researchers have attempted to classify woodland owners. Most typologies of private forest owners are from the United States and Europe (for example, Ingemarson et al. (2006) in Sweden; Boon and Meilby (2005) in Denmark; Van Herzele and Van Gossum (2006) in Belgium; Richter (2005) and Kendra and Hull (2005) in the United States). A summary of studies undertaken to identify different private woodland and forest owner types is presented in Table 1. These typologies often divide woodland owners into two main groups: (1) those with the primary objective of production (wood and non-wood products), generally with the goal of generating economic activity, and (2) those whose primary objective is consumption, both in terms of wood (wood fuel for private use) and non-wood services (recreation, nature conservation, privacy). These owners are often classified into