Applying the concept of 'Societal Relationships with Nature': insights for paludiculture and rewetting projects

Dr. Uta Berghöfer, UFZ (Leipzig)
Verein Freunde Fritz Greve e.V. (Malchin)

RRR2017 Greifswald, 27.09.2017
My research in the ValuES project

ValuES - Integrating ecosystem services into policy, planning and practice

- Rethink ecosystem services to better address cultural values
- Develop methods for assessing and integrating multiple values in political decisions

How to deal with different attitudes, world-views, knowledge-systems?
The questions that motivate my talk today:

How do we facilitate the dialog about the landscape we want to inhabit?

What could a farmer motivate (or hinder) to change his actual way of cultivating peatland?
Introducing paludiculture requires technical expertise, incentives, and investments to stimulate transition.

It also stirs conflict:
- Landscapes change
- Economic value of the land changes
- Personal and professional identities are challenged
Words possess a remarkable power to shape our perceptions

Paludiculture

“… a pioneering form of agriculture called ‘paludiculture’ that allows farmers to cultivate rather than degrade peatlands in ways that maintain their enormous carbon stocks while producing crops for sustainable biofuels.”
If I was a farmer, what could I understand from such a definition?

- My way of interacting in the world is outdated
- I do something wrong: I degrade, I do not cultivate, I do not work sustainably
- I have a passive role in the debate: somebody talks about me instead of with me
- My knowledge is inferior: others know better
- I am told what to do: produce crops for biofuels
- Somebody else sets the goals and priorities of what I am doing: maintain carbon stock
Societal Relationships with Nature:

It is not only about use versus non use
It is not only about sustainability versus degradation
It is not only about economic use versus conservation

>> Is not only about different interests

The concept of Societal relationships focusses on the multiple relations between the individual, society and the environment
The concept of “Societal Relationships with Nature”

(1) “Nature” is not a given but is rather a result of the relations that exist among the individual, society, and the physical world.

(2) The making of “nature” is a political and historical process.

(3) Multiple alternative relationships exist.
Some theoretical considerations

Structuring (perceiving) the world is an active and subjective process

- Our mind is able to acquire and maintain meaningful perceptions in an apparently chaotic world
- Our mind is constantly choosing (consciously and unconsciously/automatically) to make sense of the world around us
- How we perceive and interact within our environment is determined by our background (= result of former interactions within our environment)
Let’s explore

How diversely 'peatland' is configured by different people how they think about, relate to, and inhabit it:

Recognizing these different notions can support the facilitation of dialogs about peatland use (away from dichotomies and gridlocked conflicts)
Peatland

Farmer
Ornithologist
Hunter
Teacher
Angler
Ranger
Botanist
Novel writer
Painter
Tourist
Neighbor

Helmholtz Center for Environmental Research (UFZ)
Born in the region

Family of farmers, World-war II,
Experiences of hunger,
Food security, Low income
„Buffalos are not cows“

Born in other region
Family of farmer
Trade of wheat
Independence
Skeptical about „green arguments“

Born in other region
Already a focus on ecologically sustainable production
Managing alone
No capacities for bigger changes

Born in the region
Sense of place
Curious
Love to animals
Ready to assume risk
How can Societal Relationships be described and analysed?
Moortheater – Theatre of the peatland

- We extend an *invitation* to make new experiences (for pupils and the public)
- We invite to *experiment* with the ways of focusing on/interacting with the peatlands
- We try to open space for new perspectives
- Art as a way of perceiving and interacting within the natural environment
- Theatre as an option for transformation
Ein weiteres echtes Drama
Moortheater 2017
Im Marstall Basedow
Regie: Ulrike Konig
Eintritt für Erwachsene 15 Euro und für Kinder 7 Euro
Sometimes we have to turn ourselves upside down in order to perceive and realise...
Thank you!

www.aboutvalues.net

www.moortheater.de