

Navigating modernity: Uncovering and interpreting farmer strategies for change.

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Abstract

Farmers are the major land owners and landscape managers in most European countries and have direct influence on ecological processes taking place at both local and regional scales. Research into the landscape practice of farmers have focused on the fact that farmers form opinions and act in the context of several roles: they are both citizens, land owners and producers and as such their decision making is related to a number of arenas, which are combined in their daily practice when managing the landscape. The present paper reports on the results of two interview surveys involving a total of 188 farmers managing 8762 hectares of rural land in North Jutland, Denmark. The farmers were asked questions about their agricultural practice, landscape management practice, lifestyle, economy and decision making. Farmers expressed an increasing anxiousness about having to comply with a competitive regime for agricultural production, which they understood to include constant scale-enlargement, maintaining high levels of input substitution and continuous investment in new production facilities. In order to explore the way in which farmers depend on or try to make themselves independent of such practices, which deeply impact their landscape management, the paper discusses ways in which farmer decision making can be theorized as taking place within an "action space" extended between action potentials made available by the presence of local landscape resources and globally available inputs, technologies and implements respectively. Theoretical concepts developed in social and critical psychology are introduced, and it is discussed how such concepts may be applied in rural landscape research. Results indicate that there may be a systematic relationship between the degree to which farmers align with and depend upon local geoeological resources, and the degree to which they depend on the technologies and facilities made available on the market.