



Alien and Native Plant Species – a study of discourses



Marte Qvenild, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Fakkelgården, 2624 Lillehammer. Email: marte.qvenild@nina.no



Background

Invasive alien species are considered one of the most serious threats to biological diversity both on a local and global scale. Currently terrestrial plants can be freely imported, sold and planted in private gardens all over Norway. The environmental authorities have expressed concerns about ornamental plants that spread into the "wild" nature and become invasive. While natural scientists and managers promote the conservation of native biodiversity, lay-people often embrace alien species as part of landscapes and human-well being (Harper* 2002; Head* 2004). Thus, what people value as alien or native, as belonging or out of place affects the species opportunities to spread and establish.

Objectives

To investigate:

- 1) how individual and collective actors value species as e.g. wanted/ unwanted, natural/ unnatural, alien/ native, belonging/ out of place
- 2) what species garden owners choose to plant in their gardens
- 3) to what extent alien species are accepted out in the "wild" nature
- 4) what perceptions of nature influence actors' views and arguments
- 5) how have perceptions, practices and values changed over time

Methodology

The data will be collected through qualitative methods such as personal written stories, semi structured interviews, mapping of gardens, study of policy documents and reports, media articles, and literature reviews. The data will be analyzed by a combined situational analysis and discourse/ narrative analysis.

A) Situational analysis is a tool to map, relate, compare and contrast various elements (e.g. actors, policies, debates, key events, non-human elements etc) that constitute a phenomenon.

Three types of maps are used (Clarke* 2005):

- Situational maps; lay out major human, nonhuman, discursive and other elements of concern and provoke analyses of relations among them
- Social worlds/ arenas maps; lay out all the collective actors, key nonhuman elements, and the important arenas for negotiations
- Positional maps; lay out major positions taken and not taken (e.g. topics of focus, concern and controversies)

B) Discourse/ narrative analysis

Discourse can be defined as "a shared meaning of a phenomenon" (Adger* 2001: 3) that shape ways to speak of and comprehend the world. A way to analyze discourses is through narrative/ story line analysis. Discourse/ narrative analysis may illuminate how taken for granted "facts" and "common sense" may change and be negotiated in different contexts. A goal is to investigate links between dominating ideas, policies and practices.

Relevant questions to identify narratives are e.g.:

- What stories are told about a phenomenon? (narratives simplify the complexity of a phenomenon)
- Who tell the stories?
- How do different stories about a phenomenon compare and contrast? What are the dominant stories in different arenas? What stories are "silenced" or ignored?

Expected results

Results of the project will be to gain further insights into the horticultural field and how different actors such as private garden owners, garden centers, horticultural schools, landscape architects and authors of garden literature value and use species. Further, I wish to gain knowledge about how actors involved in horticulture relate to international and national policies and management strategies, as well as to what extent views and practices related to horticultural species have changed over time.

*Literature: Adger, W. N., Benjaminsen, T.A., Brown, K., Svarstad, H. (2001). "Advancing a Political Ecology of Global Environmental Discourses." *Development and Change* 32: 681-715., Clarke, A. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage., Harper, M. (2002). "Transformers, neophytes and aliens: tackling non-native invasive species." *ECOS* 23(2): 27-33., Head, L., Muir, P. (2005). "Living with trees - Perspectives from the suburbs." In M. Calver et al (Eds). *Proceedings 6th National Conference of the Australian Forest History Society Inc.* Rotterdam, Millpress: 85- 94