

Abstract EAAP 2009

Working Group: The role of livestock farming in rural development

Social and cultural meanings of livestock farming in Western societies

Birgit Boogaard, Simon Oosting, Bettina Bock

In contemporary Western societies, animal farming has multiple - sometimes conflicting - images. For example, on the one side it is associated with the production of affordable animal products, but at the same time people are concerned about the treatment of animals and effect on nature and the environment. The images and meanings of animal farming systems are context-dependent and can differ between cultures. Consequently, the concept of sustainable animal farming systems can differ between cultures. The presented study focused on social and cultural meanings of animal farming systems in western societies and the consequences for sustainable development. It explored the different collective meanings and underlying values of animal farming on the basis of farm visits with citizens in the Netherlands and Norway and two quantitative surveys in the Netherlands. The findings revealed three 'core values' of animal farming in the eyes of the public: Modernity, Traditions and Naturality. Citizens balanced and weighed these 'values' against each other to form their opinion about different themes in animal farming, such as the animal and the rural landscape. In relation to sustainable development these findings showed that citizens did not think about sustainable development in terms of the economic, environmental and social pillar (the EES-concept) but instead their way of thinking reflects the so-called 'MTN-concept' (Modernity, Traditions, Naturality).