

The Social Construction of Arctic Wilderness: Place Meanings, Value Pluralism, and Globalization

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Abstract

This paper offers a social constructionist approach to examining the nature and dynamics of wilderness meanings and values in which “place” is described as a geographic force in the constitution of nature and society. Viewing wilderness as socially constructed place responds to growing critiques of modern Enlightenment views of nature and society in three ways examined here. First, wilderness landscapes are seen as geographically organized and socially constructed into places that carry a plurality or diversity of meanings. A spatially rich understanding of landscape meanings goes beyond instrumental/utilitarian meanings of nature to legitimize a broader and more intangible array of landscape meanings. A framework of human-nature relationships (meanings) is presented that recognizes four kinds of meaning: adaptive, utilitarian, social/symbolic, and emotional/expressive. Second, resource management practice, historically anchored in resource utilitarianism, is generally ill-equipped to address and adjudicate among competing meanings and values of places because it employs a monistic (economic) theory of valuation. A post-Enlightenment perspective for valuing environmental goods conceptualizes valuation as a social-spatial process for the production and distribution of goods. Three alternatives to market-based (economic) models of valuation are presented: intrinsic, personal, and shared. In particular, the shared mode suggests that an important process for deciding about the production and distribution of wilderness values is vigorous reflective public discourse. Such a process does not simply reflect existing individual values, but potentially creates and improves public values. Third, the paper builds on geographic and social theory to discuss the ways in which conflicts over meaning and value of wilderness are significant consequences of modernization and globalization (urbanization, immigration, transnational social and economic integration, and, more generally, the expanding global scale movement of peoples, goods, and ideas) that pluralize and accelerate meaning “displacement” (i.e., the unmooring and scattering of place meanings). Moreover, this global contestation destabilizes and thin out meanings assigned to places and undermines older, more traditional meanings. Globalization can be understood, in part, as a process in which market norms are increasingly used to regulate more and more social interactions that previously were produced and distributed by non-market means. The paper concludes by arguing that understanding the way in which wilderness meanings and values are socially constructed and contested is necessary for effective protection and management of wilderness.

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Introduction

The purpose of this gathering in Anchorage, Alaska was to examine the compatibility of divergent if not competing values of wilderness and protected landscapes in the circumpolar north. My contribution to this topic combines several themes from my work over the past decade. One overarching theme has been to nurture and comment on the emergence of a “post-utilitarian” phase, if you will, in how we think about natural resource management – a theme that emphasizes meaning of places, landscapes, wilderness, and how these are socially constructed. As part of this emphasis much of my recent work has focused, in particular, on the role of culture and national identity in shaping the meanings of nature within the Nordic countries. A second, more recent theme has been to examine the concept of value in natural resource management. My interest in values and valuation is a reflection of my affiliation with the “Identification and Valuation of Wildland Resource Benefits” research work unit at the Rocky Mountain Research Station. In contrast to much of the unit’s work, which is focused on applying monetary concepts of value to non-market goods, my role has been to articulate a broad, pluralistic conception of value and valuation. Finally, a third theme of my work has been to examine the role of large-scale social forces (i.e., modernity and globalization) in generating instability in meanings and values associated wilderness and other “natural” places.

The organizers of this international seminar set out several objectives, which I have somewhat revised into four questions:

- (1) What is our current level of knowledge about what “wilderness” means to a given culture?
- (2) How do different societies and parts of society value wilderness protection?
- (3) What are the likely current and future threats to the various meanings and values of wilderness in the arctic?
- (4) What trends in the arctic region are impacting traditional, ecotourism, and ecological values of wilderness?

I will attempt to link the themes that have characterized my work (social construction of place meanings, value pluralism, and globalization) to the first three questions respectively, and briefly discuss how these ideas apply to specific trends impacting “wilderness” meaning and value in Norway (Question 4). But before I can layout my theoretical perspectives on the meaning and value of wilderness, I need to say something about how modern understanding of nature, wilderness, culture, and society are rooted in Enlightenment thought.

The Enlightenment refers to the emergence of an “age of reason” in European thought that began somewhere around the beginning of the 18th century and corresponded loosely with industrialization of Europe. It is associated with a particular orientation toward the world (e.g., scientific and human progress), an industrialized and market oriented economic order, and political institutions and practices organized into nation states where political legitimacy is based on reason giving rather than force or tradition. The Enlightenment fostered certain views of nature and society that we often take for

granted today. Accordingly, nature is understood as something mechanical and therefore reducible to a set of “clockwork” parts; its meaning and value is reducible to uses and commodities (as opposed to) essences; nature is in effect disenchanting. Society is understood as an aggregate of individuals liberated from local ways of life, community mores, and parochial society. Individual identities are seen as built around individual expressions of preference and desire.

Much of social and political theory of the 20th century has been prompted by critiques of this Enlightenment legacy. In advancing universal principles over parochial tradition, the universe we inherited from the Enlightenment was seemingly placeless (Shields 1990). For example, geographer John Agnew (1989) traces a deeply rooted “eclipse of place” to Enlightenment ideas emphasizing national scale processes, placeless national society over place-based community, and the detachment of people from places through the commodification of (among other things) land. Similarly, Entrikin (1991) chronicles a decline in the geographic study of place to an apparent homogenization of world culture; a belief that studying particular places was somehow “parochial;” and the tendency of the scientific method to seek generalization.

Agnew and Entrikin are in the vanguard of what amounts to a geographic turn in social thought that seeks to “re-place” the world by challenging the Enlightenment’s universalizing perspective in the realms of science and epistemology, meaning and culture, and politics and ethics. In the epistemological realm, for example, science gives preference to abstract, universal laws. Some place discourses are associated with claims that we can or should be more holistic in how we understand nature. Place represents a kind of holism (similar to ecological science) and a rejection of the mechanical view of the universe. Similarly, the universalized cultural realm sought the decline of tradition, the elevation of society over community, and the replacement of exchange value for use value. Culturally much of the enthusiasm for place ironically comes from both a romantic anti-modernism that reveres local community and a postmodern celebration of “local” differences. Romantically, there is the sense of authenticity associated with rural, community, back-to-nature life. Authentic, traditional places are annihilated by modernity and globalization. On the other hand, postmodernism is also skeptical of universalism, and therefore celebrates greater sensitivity to cultural and social otherness or difference, but does not essentialize these differences. On the contrary, postmodern differences are socially constructed and continuously contested. Finally, Enlightenment politics and ethics emphasize nation states, universal rights, and individual liberty and sovereignty. In a “re-placed” Enlightenment, place carries moral value. For example, in certain bio-ethical spheres (e.g., deep ecology and bioregionalism) place is associated with a more eco-centric value system. Good places are those that reflect ecological processes and intrinsic values. In contrast, anthropocentric views of place (in communitarian philosophies) emphasize the way attachments and affinities spring from human occupancy or history in place. This view implies that a sense for any given place develops through human occupancy, symbolization, and laying down a history in a place. In other words, places are socially constructed.

Modern social inquiry has been forged in this contest between optimistic and pessimistic views of the Enlightenment. Those holding the optimistic view see the Enlightenment as progress and express confidence in science and technology and the rational world order it engenders. To the optimists, modernity creates high standards of

living, a global economy and culture, and universal moral principles in contrast to local economies and communities, which are often economically less viable and mired in narrow parochial interests and oppressive moral conformity. Reducing place to a location containing bundles of attributes that could also occur or be reproduced elsewhere allows for more efficient production and consumption. Thus, some see modernity and even post modernity as liberating identity from the local and parochial, and thereby creating opportunity and power for those who have had little voice in the past.

For the critics, the Enlightenment has come up short of its promise of universal emancipation. According to the pessimistic view of Enlightenment, and modernity more generally, there are important virtues in the traditional sense of place and local community. The pursuit of universal principles of truth and justice have come at the expense of local culture, community, and difference. Geographic homogeneity, like other “monocultures” brings social and technological risks. Similarly, with the loss of community and place we lose local variation in meanings and forms (e.g., placelessness, mass culture, etc.). Thus, what for the optimist is the efficiency of standardization is to the pessimist is a bland retail landscape in the form of chain-store malls and freeway culture. While the Enlightenment provides a unifying framework, the modern world that follows in its wake diminishes our capacity to record feelings and experiences of place and eschews the unique character of each place. The rise of mass culture and geographic mobility homogenize the cultural landscape and weaken attachments to local place. I hope to show that these contradictions are integral to achieving compatibility among ecological, traditional, and touristic values of wilderness.

Many in the environmental community struggle with this tension as they want to be at once modern in their enthusiasm for science, strong centralized government, and the search for universal justice, and anti-modern in their concern for decline of local tradition, marginalization of local cultures, and ecological degradation. Environmentalists’ vacillation regarding Enlightenment ideals is reflected in the rationales underlying the three primary values of wilderness discussed in this seminar (traditional/subsistence use of nature, wilderness as some ecological reserve, and touristic/nature experience values). All three kinds of value imply some critique of the Enlightenment as proponents of each value appropriate the idea of wilderness in their desire to constrain modern civilization in some way. The early 20th century wilderness movement, which saw wilderness as the crucible of American character, reflects a romantic critique of Enlightenment treatment of nature. The recreational use of wilderness became a modern ritual for reproducing the character-forming experience wilderness enthusiasts associated with the American frontier. Though leaders of the wilderness movement sought limits on the spread of modern civilization, they were perhaps unwitting accomplices in the modern machination to commodify nature. They employed modern modes of thought and governance to protect wild nature by cordoning off pristine pieces into protected status. By emphasizing wilderness as specifically “designated” places for moderns to seek reconciliation with nature, by putting wilderness on the map as places to escape modern civilization, they tamed nature as surely as the loggers, miners, and road-builders.

Recognizing such internal contradictions within the wilderness movement, some have embraced wilderness protection in response to ecological critiques of the Enlightenment tendency to commodify nature. By this reckoning, wilderness is to be

valued as an ecological preserve rather than playground. But here again we can't escape some contradictions. In both views, preserve and playground, indigenous human influences are frozen in time or eradicated altogether. This draws attention to a third way in which wilderness is positioned relative to the Enlightenment. For those people who speak of and for traditional and subsistence cultures in the north, there is a desire to set limits the tendency of modern civilization to annihilate local traditions. Ironically, the effect of wilderness protection, while de-humanizing the landscape, also constrains modern civilization's tendency to colonize local culture and tradition.

Wilderness it would seem is very much caught in the contradictions of the Enlightenment, between a universal and particular view of the world. For example: Is wilderness modern, universal spatial category that can be applied to landscapes throughout the world? Is there some common, trans-Arctic meaning or value to wilderness? Are there universal qualities, meanings, or values we can identify or apply throughout the Arctic region? Or is it the product of a particular cultural construction of nature? Should we focus on what is unique to a particular landscape, whether it is wilderness or not, protected or not? Does or will wilderness advance local (indigenous) meanings of landscapes/places or annihilate them? Does wilderness protection halt the homogenizing forces of modernity and globalization, or is it an extension of this process of homogenizing local places by, for example, marketing their universal properties as exemplars of protected Arctic nature?

These broad questions surround the specific question of the compatibility of three major kinds of wilderness value being discussed in this seminar (ecological, touristic, and indigenous) and at first blush seem to challenge the wisdom of "making" wilderness, identifying its meanings, and tallying its value. But one can be critical of the Enlightenment without necessarily abandoning the Enlightenment altogether. As Entrikin (1991) argues, we may be able to find some point of view between nowhere (universal) and somewhere (particular) that he describes as an epistemological "betweenness" – informed by universal/rational discourse, but also historically and spatially specific. Entrikin reminds us that neither perspective (universal/global nowhere or traditional/local somewhere) provides adequate access to empirical and moral truths. Perhaps we can begin to resolve the divergent values of wilderness from such an epistemological position. With these ideas as a background let me now address more directly the theme of seminar with respect to the social construction of place meanings, the pluralistic nature of valuation, and the transformation of meanings and values by the forces of globalization.

The Social Construction of Place

The same intellectual shifts have given rise to the geographic turn have advanced a social constructionist view of wilderness (Cronon 1996). A constructionist approach – anchored in the sociology of knowledge, interpretive sociology, and much of what now passes as postmodern epistemology (see Burr 1995) – addresses the historical, cultural, and political processes by which humans seek out, create, evaluate, and contest specific place meanings. Within the context of nature and wilderness, social construction refers to social, cultural, and political processes by which groups of people create shared meanings and understandings of a place and how these shared meanings, in turn, structure social actions in and with respect to those places. The designation of wilderness

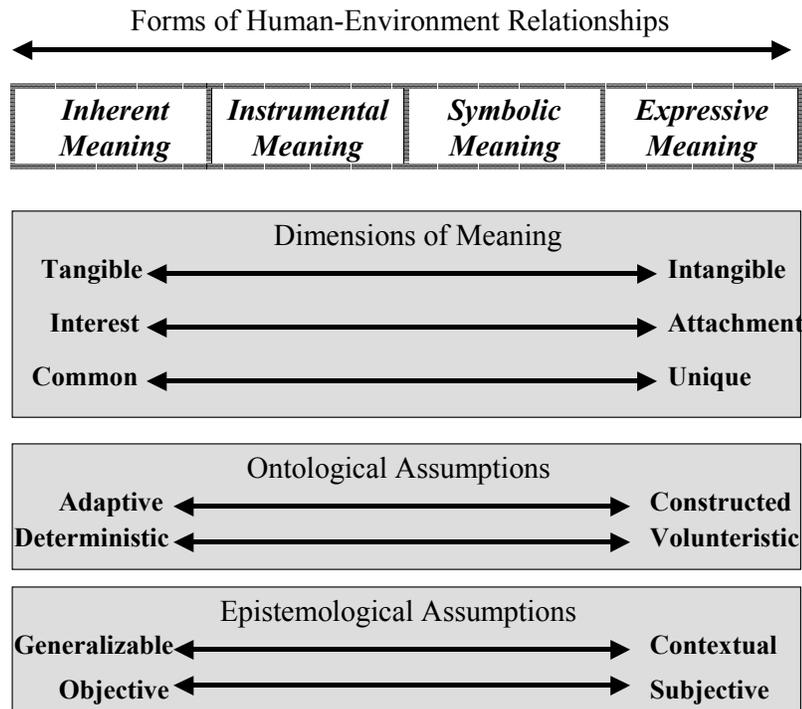
landscapes in America is a case in point. The debate over wilderness designation was subject to lengthy social and political negotiations that eventually resulted in a formal legal definition. This legal definition, complete with use and management prescriptions, now shapes the way these landscapes are used, experienced, and ultimately modified.

A social constructionist approach to wilderness focuses on the historical, cultural, and political processes by which people seek out, create, and contest specific place meanings. This can be illustrated as a dynamic process of “representation” (assigning meaning to a place), which in turn guides action toward that place. We can think of these as the twin processes of mapping meaning (resource assessments, forest plans) and then managing that resource guided by this assessment of meaning. This creates a new place. The problem is that more than one representation is possible, giving rise to a plurality of place meanings. There is more than one community competing to represent the meaning of a place. And having negotiated among these competing conceptions, there are few guarantees that places will conform to the “planned” image. Wildfire is a good example. Human action has sought to repress fires, but this only made the fires more catastrophic. It also reminds us that social constructionism doesn’t mean humans necessarily get their way.

The notion that landscapes, including wilderness, are socially produced suggests that their meaning is anchored in history and culture and not simply its enduring, tangible, or visible properties. The point is not to deny the existence of a hard reality “out there,” but to recognize that the meaning of that reality is continuously created and re-created through social interactions and practices. It is impossible to talk about the meaning and value of wilderness without acknowledging to some degree the role of culture in giving meaning to things. For example, just as the cultural idea of *allemannsretten* is vital for understanding the meaning of Nordic countryside, the frontier and pioneer history of the U.S. is critical for understanding the meaning and management of public forests, wilderness, and national parks. Early American settlers constructed a pristine landscape empty of civilization. They settled a vast and “unoccupied” continent that, from Anglo-European eyes, was initially seen as devoid of meaning apart from the instrumental uses that could be extracted from it. The specific meaning of any particular place was, in effect, very thin to start with. Landscapes were seen as mere “resources” which lacked any historical or cultural significance until Europeans occupied it. Slowly the American landscape has taken on more and more cultural and symbolic meanings. Wilderness and the frontier began to symbolically represent American civilization (and the civilizing of a primeval landscape). Recreational use of wilderness and nature became a ritual for reproducing the frontier experience and what was taken to be the American character.

In the absence of a long history of making places, we Americans have great difficulty legitimating emotional, symbolic, or sacred meanings and instead tend to seek a “rational” basis for resource allocations. The history of public resource management is one of dividing up the landscape into tracts for various uses. Initially this was largely a *laissez faire* process of disposal of the public land to private, utilitarian uses. For those remaining lands that were not transferred to private ownership we developed highly bureaucratic and rational processes of allocating specific uses to specific tracts of land. Lacking deeper historical and cultural meanings, we were free to employ criteria of utilitarian efficiency to guide land use allocations. Only after extensive settlement of the

land, with more and more of the land cultivated and civilized, could we imagine a symbolic value to “preserving” as opposed to “using” the land. As we began to associate the frontier with the American character and experience, portions of the land began to take on symbolic value as wilderness. Thus, only as we created history could we sanctify places in the American landscape, and even then we often sought a more utilitarian reason for of such actions.



Source: Williams and Patterson (1999)

Figure 1. Framework for mapping landscape meanings.

What I am talking about are the many ways to characterize human-environment relations (see Figure 1). It is another way to illustrate that “meaning” of places is not just a biological response to stimuli, or an instrumental contingency, but is also a cultural product, and an individual expression. A key theme here is that some meanings are more adaptive and biologically determined and others more cultural, expressive, and volunteristic. To reduce all meanings or relations to objects, places, or landscapes to one kind of relationship (usually instrumental) is unwarranted. But historically we have drawn on a narrow conception of the meaning (usually instrumental) in characterizing the value of natural resources (even the words natural resources instead of ecosystems, landscapes, places) suggests as much. It is part of our Enlightenment legacy to treat nature as commodity.

A useful approach for mapping wilderness meaning is to start with Fournier's (1991) description of three characteristics of the meanings attached to objects: tangibility, commonality, and emotionality. *Tangibility* refers to whether “meaning is primarily objective, tangible, and verifiable through the senses or whether it is primarily subjective,

interpreted through experience and dependent on associations” – that is whether “meaning is resident in the object itself or in the mind of the user” (Fournier 1991: 738). Hence the smooth ground affords walking, a tree affords climbing, a body of water affords fishing. With science and technology, new meanings of objects and places can be created as when we learned how to turn wood fibre into paper. In contrast, latent or symbolic meanings carried by an object or place are assigned to it by a culture, social group, or an individual. Thus, a grove of redwoods might afford contemplating one's spiritual place in the universe or represent the home to an assortment of fabled and feared creatures.

Overlapping somewhat with tangibility, the *commonality* dimension refers to the degree to which meanings are shared versus highly individualized. Shared meanings allow for effective communication and facilitate social integration; however, in some important contexts highly personalized or unique meanings (such as those associated with favorite places or cherished objects) may serve an equally valuable function of differentiating the individual from society. Thus, while many natural areas or parks have shared, culturally-specific public meanings, individual users often come to personally identify with such areas, transforming these cultural meanings into something of personal significance.

Where tangibility and commonality refer to the source of meaning, the *emotionality* of meaning is associated with arousal, intensity, or depth of attachment. For environmental meanings, emotionality may vary in intensity from immediate sensory delight to long-lasting and deeply rooted attachment (Tuan 1974). The emotional dimension often focuses on place attachment as a deep emotional or affective bond between an individual or group and a particular place (Giuliani and Feldman 1993). Emotionality can be thought of as an indication of the depth or extent of meaning with symbolic and spiritual meanings often associated with high levels of attachment to an object or place. Representing the intensity of meaning, emotionality is the most variable and individualized aspect of meaning and consequently a focal point for natural resource conflict.

The Enlightenment tended to reduce all meaning to instrumental or utilitarian relations between human needs and environmental properties. Recognizing that places and landscapes represent socially constructed systems of meaning, a post-utilitarian or post-Enlightenment view of human-environment relations suggests several alternative modes for conceptualizing and mapping place meanings. Building on Saegert and Winkel (1990) review of environmental psychology, Williams and Patterson (1999) proposed a framework for mapping landscape meanings that recognizes four approaches to understanding the meanings people assign to natural landscapes: inherent/aesthetic, instrumental/goal-directed, cultural/symbolic, and individual/expressive (Figure 1). In addition to their distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions, each approach conceptualizes environmental meaning in distinct ways as described by Fournier's (1991) three dimensions: tangibility, commonality, and emotionality.

Inherent Meanings—Saegert and Winkel's (1990) describe an adaptive paradigm within environmental psychology in which meaning is tied to the premise that biological survival motivates behavior. Accordingly, human perceptual systems have evolved to meet the adaptive needs of an uncertain information environment. As one type of adaptive response, aesthetic preferences, for example, are embedded in innate

relationships between the organism and its environment as opposed to being learned, socially acquired (constructed), or volitional responses. Knowledge about the underlying determinants of adaptive responses to the landscape is seen as objective and highly generalizable across time and place. Thus, meaning is determined at a biological level as predictable responses such as pleasure and interest (see Vittersø, this volume) to features of the environment.

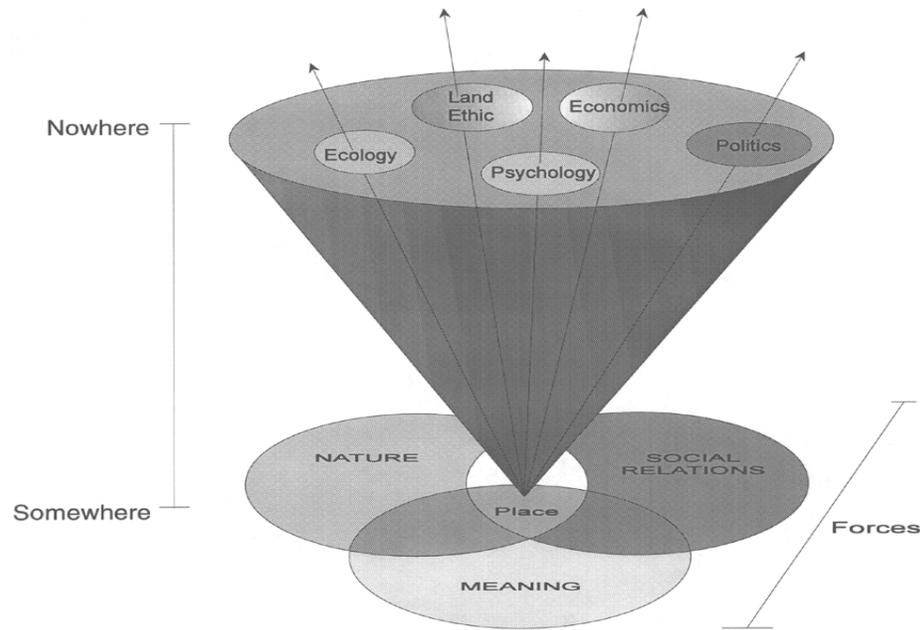
Instrumental/Goal-Directed Meanings—As reflected in the instrumental or commodity paradigm that has historically guided resource management, the predominate way of assigning meaning to natural landscapes has been to assess a resource's capacity to promote behavioral and economic goals. Resources are seen as means rather than ends (Williams and others 1992). Individual places are theoretically interchangeable, even reproducible, when reduced to particular combinations of goal-fulfilling attributes. Humans are viewed as rational planners who select the best options within a system of social and physical opportunities and constraints. Ontologically, the instrumental view gives the individual more autonomy (volitional choice) as to how to prioritize needs and goals than the aesthetic model, but retains a level of determinism by assuming that, given a certain goal there is some defined set of environment-utility contingencies (environmental features) that determine the usefulness of a given resource for a given goal. An individual's particular goals are subjective and contextual, but the relation between environmental features and the potential to meet particular behavioral goals is seen as objectively determined and more or less generalizable across space and time.

Cultural/Symbolic Meanings—Inherent and instrumental/goal-directed forms of meaning represent provide the conceptual bases for important and widely used procedures for conducting landscape assessments and inventories. A third way of characterizing human-environment relations involves mapping sociocultural or symbolic meanings (Saegert and Winkel 1990; Stokols 1990). The sociocultural approach reflects a conceptual shift away from predominantly stimulus-based (inherent) and intrapersonal (instrumental) explanations of behavior toward those that view meaning as socially constructed within the cultural, historical, and geographical contexts of day-to-day life. From a sociocultural perspective, for example, the same forest can symbolize ancestral ways of life, valued commodities, or essential livelihood to different groups of people. Thus, an environment can acquire varied and competing social and political meaning through its association over time with particular activities or groups. Stokols (1990) contrasts the dominant instrumental (tangible) view with sociocultural/symbolic approaches by noting that the instrumental perspective provides the means to achieve technological solutions to environmental problems through an understanding of an environment's capacity to promote particular behavioral and economic goals. In contrast, the symbolic or spiritual approach to environmental planning views the environment as an end in itself rather than as a tool – “as a context in which fundamental human values can be cultivated and the human spirit can be enriched” (Stokols 1990: 642). From the sociocultural view, natural resources are valued not only for instrumental purposes, but also exist as *places* that people become attracted to and even attached to because such places possess emotional, symbolic, and spiritual meaning. However, despite increasing recognition that symbolic meanings of the environment are important, they remain poorly represented in environmental decision-making (Greider and Garkovich 1994).

Individual/Expressive Meanings—Like the sociocultural approach, interest in individual expressive meanings emphasizes a socially constructed and more voluntaristic view of reality. The study of expressive meaning, however, is even more deeply rooted in a subjectively oriented phenomenology (Altman and Low 1992), emphasizing individual level processes and a recognition that individuals have the potential to assign intangible and relatively unique meaning to places and things. Unlike adaptive and instrumental meanings, expressive meanings do not apply so much to abstract classes of environments or their separable features as they do to specific, holistic places. The significance of individual/expressive meanings is captured in the concept of *place-identity*. According to Cuba and Hummon (1993: 112) “place identity arises because places, as bounded locales imbued with personal, social, and cultural meanings, provide a significant framework in which identity is constructed, maintained, and transformed.” With involvement and attachment to places, individuals actively construct and affirm a sense of self. The places we frequent help to communicate to ourselves and others “who we are.” Further, while it may be difficult to manage for individual relationships to places, it is nevertheless important to recognize that people do assign individualized meanings to environments and respond to resource management issues on the basis of these meanings. The process of “individualization” (differentiation of individual identity from society) is important within a modern, western society. Within American society, the frontier, wilderness, and everyday natural landscapes have been, and remain, particularly important contexts within which individual identity is situated and affirmed. Along the same lines, Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) describe places as both *enabling* people to create individual meanings that deviate from those held by the primary social group or community and *embedding* because places have meanings associated with them that can be passed along to the individual from the social group.

Taken together any given place embodies a plurality of meanings. The totality of meaning cannot be reduced to any single form. Different groups may emphasize different meanings, and following an earlier point, these tend to evolve over time as people create history (e.g., non-instrumental meaning) within that landscape. But much of the difficulty for resource management has been that the more tangible (adaptive and instrumental) forms have been easier to represent in resource assessments and inventories and in the process ignoring the more subjective, diverse, and contentious cultural and symbolic meanings.

Thus, the Enlightenment has had a narrowing influence on reason and meaning. Sack (1992) aptly captures both in his geographic characterization of the social construction of reality. Sack characterizes reality as constituted from three realms of social forces (nature, social relations, and meaning), which converge at a specific point on the spatial plane and create the everyday experience of place. Nature refers to the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of phenomena and how these forces affect human life. Culture consists of the realm of social relations (social, economic, and political forces) and the realm of meaning (ideas, values, and beliefs that give meaning to the world). The concept of place constitutes a concrete focal point where these forces overlap (Figure 2).



Source: Adapted from Sack, 1992

Figure 2. Sack's relational geographic framework.

In addition to examining the ontological forces that constitute place, in this case wilderness, places can also be viewed (experienced) from multiple epistemological perspectives as illustrated by the vertical plane in the figure. These differing perspectives have been described as occurring along a continuum from somewhere to virtually nowhere (recall that the Enlightenment tends to privilege the view from nowhere). What is traditionally thought of as science involves the abstraction of a point of view from somewhere (the place of everyday experience) to a more remote, public, and distant point of view that is virtually nowhere.

The process of abstraction, though profoundly useful in many cases, has two undesirable consequences that are highly relevant to examining the meanings of wilderness areas. First, abstraction is a decontextualizing process that results in a loss of local/particular meanings. The indigenous experience or meaning of a wilderness area is marginalized in the universalizing discourse of "wilderness." This is certainly an issue in Alaska, but it occurs whenever a landscape is "classified" as belonging to some "category." Methods of knowing that minimize or obscure important emotional or symbolic meanings of objects, events, or places, no matter how scientific they might be, are unlikely to be well-received by those who sense the loss. Second, abstraction is a process of moving from the highly subjective, but integrated experience of place to the more public, external, and objective experience that tends to fragment knowledge along disciplinary and theoretical lines. Wilderness management has been overburdened with the abstract technical lenses of nowhere -- microeconomics, management science, and linear programming. Again, Entrikin (1991) describes finding points of view between somewhere and nowhere as an epistemological position of "betweenness" -- informed by scientific discourse, but also historically and spatially specific.

To summarize, wilderness, in the Arctic or any other place, is a human construction imposed upon the landscape. The particular landscape may carry a variety of meanings to various individuals, groups, and cultures and these may be generated from both a local (somewhere) and universal (nowhere) perspective. Any particular tract of land we might call wilderness may be home to some “local” people; an exotic human-less “other” to foreigners and tourists, or a genetic reservoir to scientists and environmentalists. The point is that there is no single objective condition of the landscape with inexorable implications for management. Recognizing wilderness as a kind of meaning we give to the landscape helps to frame the question of the compatibility between traditional, ecotourist, and ecological values of Arctic wilderness. Compatibility must address both a broader framework of meaning that recognizes inherent, instrumental, symbolic and expressive relations to places and multiple perspectives from somewhere to nowhere. Meanings are spatially and historically contingent, and continuously re-constructed into the future.

Valuing Wilderness

Thus far I have noted that the ideals of the Enlightenment have marginalized “place” and the “particular” in favor of the universal and general and that this has contributed to a narrow (largely instrumental) conception of place meanings. Similarly, there are diverse ways of thinking about values and valuation anchored in different assumptions about human social relations. One of the major challenges going into this meeting is, in fact, to try to figure out what everyone means by values in the phrase “values of wilderness.” Among the synonyms mingled in with the use of the word *values* are benefits, desires, attitudes, meanings, preferences, services, reasons, motivations, and uses. Adding to the confusion we also find ourselves asking similarly sounding questions: How much are these different “values” worth? What good reasons are there for establishing and managing wilderness? How do we choose among these various good (valuable) qualities? It is hard to move forward with a discussion of wilderness values if we are uncertain as to which questions we are really asking. One place to start is to distinguish between values as the benefits or services (and costs) connected to wilderness (e.g., clean water, human development) from valuation as the means by which society orders (i.e., produces and distributes) these goods and services. This is especially true when people talk about economic values. In the value-as-benefit-or-service sense, “economic value” seems to refer to a class of values or benefits (e.g., commercial uses of wilderness). But in its valuation sense, “economic value” describes a procedure or set of criteria for judging the relative worth of something within the class of values. In the latter case, for example, economic valuation criteria might include such “values” as efficiency, whereas other evaluative criteria might center on the “values” of fairness or moral duty – values that cannot be put on the same plane as “services” because they are ideals we hold about society and self. This leads to yet another higher-order question about values: how do we “value” or order potentially competing evaluative criteria?

The concept of values is perhaps one of the most enigmatic in social science – so widely, but divergently used in both scholarly and everyday discourse. At a minimum it is possible to distinguish four theoretical approaches to the concept of (Kuentzel 2000). *Value as functional utility* can be thought of as the “value” of some process to a system.

For example, a potato has nutritional value for human physiological functioning. Value conceived in this way does not invoke any conception of a valuing agent. It is not a statement of ought or preference, but merely what is the function or value of something to a system that can be defined through a scientific description and understanding of the system (i.e., wilderness). It is not the subject of social science for the most part. *Social utility* represents the view of values from the perspective of economics and some social psychology and is perhaps the most common understanding of values as applied to natural resource management. Value refers to the fitness of some object for some purpose and is assigned to an object by an individual human subject. *Social cohesion* is what most sociologists think of when the term “values” comes up. Accordingly, society is held together by shared values that direct and constrain behavior. These are not formulated in functional relationships between objects and human desires; rather, they represent shared beliefs or standards of appropriate behavior. Individuals may adopt different systems of values, but they exist as entities in society. Finally from a *social discourse* perspective, values do not exist as such, but are emergent properties of social interaction, especially communication. Values are socially constructed representations of social experience within a given context. Thus, there may or may not be widespread agreement about what is valuable. For example, the discourse of romantic transcendentalists, Thoreau and Muir and ecologists Leopold helped to create the value “wilderness” and, as a result of continuing discourse, wilderness is now valued more and in different ways than it was in mid 19th century. The discussion has even “progressed” to a point where some even question the value of the wilderness idea, particularly as this discourse has moved beyond the Anglo-American context (Callicot and Nelson 1998; Cronon 1996).

Reconciling the divergent meanings and constructions of wilderness is not just a debate about which meanings and values are at stake, it also involves examining the appropriate social mechanisms and institutional arrangements by which society orders, evaluates, and decides about their relative production, maintenance, and distribution. From an Enlightenment, utilitarian perspective, *the* best method for ordering or allocating goods was the market, an institution with rational procedures for making valuations (and in the absence of markets for certain goods we should create artificial, surrogate markets). This approach reached its zenith with operations research thinking in which experts would identify the “outcomes” of plan alternatives, economists would measure their values, and linear programmers would calculate the best, most efficient alternative. Accordingly, values did not pertain to places or other holistic spatial entities, but to their useful and exchangeable properties.

In contrast to most economic approaches to value, which seek a single, monistic yardstick for comparison of all values, there are value pluralists who argue that not all values can or should be so ordered on a single dimension or standard. A useful illustration of the different modes of evaluation one could take comes from Anderson (1990) critique of market ethics. Anderson begins by noting that the market is an institution or procedure for making valuations and, like any institution, it embodies norms for regulating the production, exchange and enjoyment of goods that are sensitive to some qualitative differences among values and insensitive to others. Her main concern is how to determine which goods are properly the subject of market transactions (and by implication market valuations) and which are not. The task of reconciling the diverse values of arctic wilderness is not just a task of identifying possible goods (values or

benefits) that might accrue from wilderness protection (e.g., carbon sequestration, human development, or the preservation of subsistence cultures), but also a question of the appropriate means by which society should decide among the production, distribution and maintenance of these various goods.

She describes four modes for the valuation of goods and the corresponding social norms that regulate these different types of exchange (Table 1). The key feature of the use or market mode, of which we are most familiar, is that it which involves subordinating something to one's own ends. Market norms of exchange include: (1) impersonal relations (transactions with strangers), (2) freedom to pursue one's own advantage unrestrained by consideration of others' advantage, (3) equating values to matters of personal taste, (4) where goods exchanged are exclusive in consumption and rival in competition, and (5) where dissatisfaction is expressed by exit from the market. These norms can be contrasted with three other valuation modes or sets of social norms for regulating the production, distribution, and maintenance of goods. Even though we recognize that not all values (goods) are exchangeable in market transactions, a key assumption of economics is that there is a single yardstick upon which all values can be measured and ordered. This amounts to a monistic theory of value in which everything can be ordered as some kind of trade-off.

Table 1. Modes and Norms for Valuation of Wilderness

<i>Modes</i>	<i>Norms of Social Relations/Exchange</i>
Use/Market	Impersonal, advantage, taste, exclusive & rival, exit
Intrinsic	Respect, acceptance
Personal	Intimacy, attachment, gift, commitment
Shared	Fraternity, need, mutual benefit, voice

Source: Anderson (1990)

One alternative is what she calls the intrinsic mode. Intrinsic norms deal primarily with respect and acceptance of the object as it is, rather than for how it can be used. Here is where we would likely locate ecological and aesthetic values as well as the intrinsic value of indigenous cultures. We can, as economists have shown, identify how the economic value of such goods using contingent valuation and other pricing techniques. But this is nevertheless an act of subordinating their intrinsic value to an economic end. To illustrate, economic who were asked to assess the damage to certain villages caused by the Exxon-Valdez oil spill concluded that the damage was equivalent to the cost of relocating the entire village to an undamaged location (Peterson et al. in press). But what

do we make of the value of the history and cultural forms and relations people form in a specific place? Are such values literally re-placeable? Can they be monetized? This limitation is not just confined to the application of economic analyses to non-western cultures. Many people object to questions about their willingness to pay for clean air on the grounds that they are being asked to pay to restore that which is intrinsically good, but which has been degraded by allowing people to subordinate its value to a mere economic good. Thus, it only makes sense to ask the question of willingness to pay from within the use mode of exchange.

A second alternative involves the personal or sentimental mode of exchange. Objects, people, and places are often loved and cherished. Whereas commodities are interchangeable, cherished goods are unique, irreplaceable, and given up only under duress. In this case the dominant norms have to deal with commitment to the relationship and expressions of identity and self. Anderson develops her ideas about this mode by discussing interpersonal relations among friends and family and the role played by goods exchanged in such relationships. Goods such as trust, loyalty, sympathy, affection, admiration, companionship, and devotion cannot be bought and sold (though she notes that people sometimes deceive themselves in the attempt). Goods such as these (exchanged in personal relationships) are guided by the spirit of gift rather than the spirit of commercial exchange. To impose market norms of exchange for these goods undermines their authenticity and worth. Gifts of love or intimacy for example, “cannot genuinely be procured for oneself by paying others to produce them or by appealing to another’s personal advantage to provide them” (Anderson 1990: 186). Extending this idea to cherished landscapes or places, we can recognize the value of a specific wilderness as not a result of consuming its wilderness qualities, but as a kind of gift one receives through long and repeated interaction with that landscape. Perhaps here is where we might ask not, what are the benefits that people take from wilderness, but rather, in what ways do people contribute something to its value?

The third alternative mode deals with value as public symbols and expressions of shared ideals. This is the political mode of evaluation. As Anderson (1990: 181) notes some “values cannot be realized in private acts of use, but reside in shared public understanding of the meaning and significance of the good.” As an example, Anderson describes sites of historical events as having value as part of national heritage. Preservation of these values requires constraints on use such as zoning ordinances to preserve the architectural integrity of the features and buildings associated with such sites. The norms for these shared community relationships contrast sharply with the norms of the market. These norms include fraternity in place of self-interest, mutual benefit in place of exclusive use, need over want, and voice instead of exit as the expression of dissatisfaction. Fraternity is expressed through common provision of services in contrast to the separateness of parties in a commercial transaction or the special relationship between parties in personal gift relationships. Publicly provided goods are provided to all, not just to those who pay. Shared goods are necessarily realized in common activities and rights to these cannot be fully distributed in exclusive increments. When goods being distributed are not public, distribution takes place in accordance with some conception of the relative need of a citizen rather than in accordance with want. Finally, citizens participate in the allocation of goods based on voice rather than exit. The appropriate determination of need is based on reason giving

and democratic deliberation. For example, Anderson compares the way respect is given between market and political relations. In market transactions one respects the privacy of the consumer by not inquiring into the reasons for wanting something beyond a level necessary to satisfy that want. In public transactions respect for fellow citizens is to take their reasons for advocating a particular position seriously. Public goods are produced and distributed through institutions and practices that deliberate over the shared concerns of citizens. Market mechanisms of exit do not respond to reasoned ideals any differently than from unreflective wants. The realization of shared values requires a forum for working out these understandings together.

Attempting to order these shared goods by market mechanisms tends to detract from their value. In an argument reminiscent of Olmsted's views on public parks, Anderson notes that the goods provided by public spaces are qualitatively different than if they were provided privately. Public space promotes the free and diverse association necessary for fraternity, civility, and democracy (see also Putnam 2000). With a private system of roads, for example, one would need to ask permission of each owner to visit people and places made accessible by such roads, thus creating potential restraints on the freedom of association that forms the bedrock of democracy.

Anderson reminds us that we have inherited from the Enlightenment a narrow conception of valuation as something technocratic, expert-driven, utilitarian, efficient and instrumental. Not only is our market/use concept of value overly narrow, it tends to colonize all other modes of valuation (Anderson 1990; Wolfe 1989). Intrinsic, personal, and shared modes of evaluation constitute constraints on use. In capitalist societies we tend to value the dismantling of these constraints to "free up the market." Modernization can be understood, in part, as a process in which market norms are increasingly used to regulate more and more social interactions that previously were produced and distributed by non-market means. An important tool for deciding about the production and distribution of these various goods is vigorous, reflective public discourse. This kind of deliberation can create and improve public values and is an essential feature driving the growing movement toward collaborative decision making in natural resource planning.

Recognizing values as ephemeral products of social discourse enlarges and democratizes rationality, as reasoning and reason giving are expanded to all citizens. Rationality is not the exclusive terrain of scientists but the product (mutual understanding) of ordinary people working issues in particular times and places; and democracy doesn't mean one person one vote (in that sense it is little different than a market), it implies the exercise of public reason for the purpose of transforming individual meanings and values. Taking an exclusively market view of preferences (as the sovereign realm of individual consumers) suppresses the search for a public or citizen understanding. In sum, valuation involves reason giving rather than simply desiring.

Globalization and Wilderness

Having described the social construction of wilderness as the production and contestation of a multiplicity of meanings and compared various modalities for ordering or valuing environmental goods, the two remaining objectives of the seminar/workshop relate in one way or another to describing social forces or change and their consequences for Arctic wilderness. One way to organize or think about the threats and/or trends affecting Arctic wilderness is to think in terms of large-scale social processes,

specifically globalization. First, I want to address the question of how modern social processes (globalization) impact the meanings and values of wilderness. Second, I will briefly illustrate how this process might be affecting the meaning and value of nature in Norway.

Globalization refers to the restructuring of time-space relations through rapidly accelerating rates of exchange, movement, and communication across space and contributes directly to the unmooring (disembedding) of social relations, meanings and identities from place. Globalization tends to thin-out and destabilize place meanings and aggravates conflicts over how places or natural landscapes should be developed and managed. In a premodern era, local conditions were more predominant as constraints on how people adapted to and fashioned their world. Exploiting nature was limited by local knowledge and the quantity and quality of locally available natural resources constrained economic and social activities. This tended to produce isolated local cultures with social patterns necessarily fitted to the contingencies of that place. This doesn't mean that humans were benign by modern ecological standards as Soulé (1995) reminds us. Rather the scope and scale of human-environment interactions were more directly embodied in a place. In other words societies were adapted to the opportunities and constraints of local place.

In the modern era, as Harvey (1989) argues, the cultural invention of capital accumulation freed production activities from the constraints of local place and began a process of transforming places around the logic of market economics. Modernization, (whether in the form of industrial markets, mass communications, or more efficient transportation) has in an important sense "freed" ourselves from constraints of place, or in economic terms, allowed for more efficient use of resources. This has had profound implications for both nature and society. Nature was in a sense demystified and disenchanted (Taylor 1992). Whatever inherent moral value nature may have possessed, it was supplanted by a view of nature as an instrumental resource to be exploited. Similarly, individuals were liberated from local ways of life, community mores, and parochial society. Thus, social theorists recognize that modernity – as the unmooring of social relations, production and consumption, and even our identity from particular places – also leads to greater freedom to contest the meanings we ascribe to both our immediate and more distant surroundings. Just as material life is no longer bound by local ecological limits, modern social norms and practices have become increasingly the province of the sovereign consumer/voter. While much has been gained in terms of material well-being and individual autonomy and liberty, modern social relations has also led to the displacement of local, community norms and standards of behavior by individual preferences as expressed in the marketplace or the voting booth (Wolfe 1989). Thus, the meaning of a place (wilderness) is increasingly subject to a kind of ideological marketplace with all of the competition and instability that goes with it.

Increasingly modern forms of dwelling, working, and playing involve circulating through geographically extended networks of social relations and a multiplicity of widely dispersed places and regions, yet much of our traditional concepts and frames of reference presume that people and cultures are normally rooted in one place. In a globalized age meaning is created in a spatially decontextualized world of mass consumption and mass communications, a world in which market forces create and transform meaning at a rapid pace. Globalization partitions space into smaller and finer

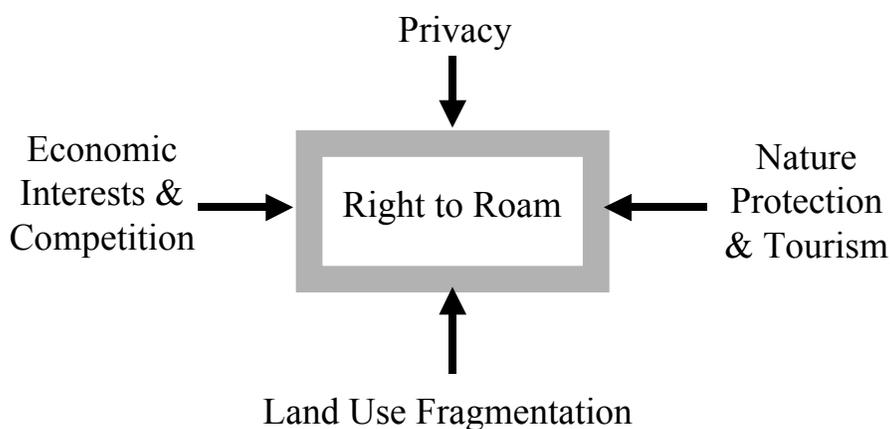
units and assigns specialized meaning to each. “From the fewer, more local, and thicker places of premodern society, we now live among the innumerable interconnected thinner places and even empty ones” (Sack 1997: 9). Globalization creates a tension within local places between searching out ever-wider spheres of exchange and movement and simultaneously provoking an inward and deliberate search for authenticity, a conscious effort to evoke a sense of place and connectedness. It makes “place-bound” identities more salient as the homogenizing forces of globalization spur the search for an authentic stable place, which is otherwise threatened from the “outside.” Place meanings are less and less proscribed by local culture and tradition, and instead meanings are plural, individualized, and more contestable.

In places where contact with nature has been central to national and cultural identity, any change, loss, or thinning of traditional meanings and values associated with natural landscapes is likely to be especially troubling. In Norway, for example, people feel their distinctive outdoor traditions are increasingly threatened by globalization and rapid urbanization. Norwegians see their cultural identity as potentially threatened by the European unification and express concern that the growing use of natural landscapes as nature-tourism destinations by the rest of Europe will interfere with these traditions (Kaltenborn and others 1995). Norwegian’s tend to think of themselves as a nation of agrarian peasants who live close to the land. Rapid urbanization and international immigration naturally tend to undermine this view as does the trend toward global trade and economic interactions with the rest of Europe. Globalization makes it more difficult to maintain national myths and rituals that define what it means to be Norwegian, particularly those associated with being close to nature. Norwegians struggle to balance traditional and modern lifestyles, keeping farmers on the land (the district policy), and maintain the tradition of open access to nature.

As Norwegian anthropologist Eriksen (1997) argues, through their power to ritualize the cultural memories of rural Scandinavian life, outdoor traditions provide a way to shelter one's identity from changes associated with an increasingly multi-ethnic, urbanized, and globalized culture. However, globalization also appears to be pressing in on traditional forms of nature contact and weakening them as they become the commodified interest of increasingly spatially and culturally distant social groups. What tends to happen is that the myths and practices become elevated in importance, yet the modern world still dilutes their meaning as they become commodities to the rest of the world.

As a concrete example, Norway and the other Fenno-Scandinavian countries have a cultural tradition of *allemannsrett* (every man’s right), which is a right to roam through the landscape (even across private property). It can be thought of as a “free space” of public rights to the land beyond the private economic/use rights. It is a type of common pool resource which allows anyone the right to traverse, camp, and collect edibles and small wood, but does not allow one to hunt, drive a vehicle, or collect materials of commercial value. Yet as Kaltenborn et al (in press) argue this traditional practice is being constricted by globalization (See Figure 3). It evolved in a “pre-modern” context where population densities were lower and travel was much more localized. One impact of globalization is that it simply makes it easier for distant people to take advantage of local opportunities, making the public commons more difficult to sustain. In addition the “free space” of public rights is being squeezed by the increasing commercialization and

commodification of what were formerly non-economic goods. Tourism is a good example. Commercial outfitters can potentially guide/host clients on private property, earn a living yet pay nothing to the landowner. Other sources of decline are the fragmentation and specialization of land use. Smaller, more intensively managed parcels leave little “free space” let over between smaller and more intensively used parcels. Finally, not unlike the controversy over subsistence uses of wilderness in Alaska, creating nature protection areas has the effect of usurping traditional rights of access by promulgating more restrictions on how the landscape can be used.



Source: Sandell (1995)

Figure 3. Globalization and Scandinavian public access to nature.

Globalization has the effect of amplifying the importance of traditional forms of nature contact for those cultures that see it as part of their identity. At the same time globalization allows more people to seek out and contest these same values. In other words modern communication and travel allow more people to access wilderness meanings and values and in the process appropriate and transform them for their own benefit. More people defining what a place (wilderness means) tends to destabilize “traditional” meanings and intensify conflict. Wilderness landscapes have become important sites for what might be called cultural or identity politics. This returns us to some perplexing questions for wilderness. Is wilderness a way to reconnect modern identities to nature, place, and traditional lifestyles? Can wilderness facilitate maintenance of ancestral ways of life in a global world? Or is wilderness just one more piece of ground to become segmented by modernity and thereby eventually diluted of traditional meanings?

Conclusions

A social constructionist perspective suggests that society has more or less always functioned by working through contested meanings of places, things, resources, and ideas. However, the disequilibrium that is so much a part of modernity and globalization propel this process of contesting place meanings to new levels of intensity and geographic scope. Given our collective power to make and remake places, not even wilderness can be “protected” and preserved as some pre-modern authentic landscape. The social construction of meaning is not completely amorphous. The creation and contestation of meaning involves social interactions structured within and by interest group formation and action, regulatory agencies, administrative procedures, law, local government, planning processes, etc. These processes are most obvious in the formal political arena, but they also occur through everyday practices such as deciding where to vacation or retire; whether and where to build a new shopping mall or Wall-Mart; and a thousand other small decisions made by consumers, businesses, families, and government officials. The point is that a focus on a socio-cultural view of meaning formation causes us to examine not just what values people hold, but where these values and meanings come from, how they vary from place to place and community to community, how they are negotiated in society, how they are used in conflict situations, how they are impacted by modernization, and how they influence policy decisions. By focusing on how values and meanings are socially created and contested and how these affect resource management systems, we can begin to develop social knowledge from the epistemological position of “betweenness” discussed earlier. Such knowledge tries to recognize the influence of both globalization and spatial and historical context and develop procedures to address inevitable social conflicts and differences.

Culture can be thought of as a map of meanings through which the world is made intelligible. However, culture is not entirely consensual or shared, as it has often been described, but is something that varies across individuals and groups and is contestable by various interests. Wilderness designation, management, and use thus take on different meanings for different people and, in the process of negotiation, new meanings and group identities are created and modified. Exercises in mapping meanings are, by definition then, necessarily political acts in which meanings are being created and contested, with certain meanings gained and lost in the process. This view recognizes also power relations. It asks: who gets to draw the map? Globalization makes local meanings seemingly more salient and threatened as it destabilizes what are often taken to be more authentic, indigenous meanings. This constructionist approach focuses on how meanings and values are produced and reproduced through actual social practices that take “place” in historically contingent and geographically specific contexts. The challenge is to learn how to collectively work through largely inevitable social change wrought by globalization and across cultural differences in meaning and values, which are increasingly diverse, individualized and commodified.

The mere examination of topics such as wilderness meanings and values, indigenous cultures, and cultural differences reflects a uniquely modern concern – these things are made problematic by globalization. Place meanings and values are most evident to people when these things appear to be threatened from the outside. From the theoretical perspective of social constructionism, a major impact of modernity and

globalization is to destabilize and thin-out the meaning of places. In addition it helps us to appreciate, understand, and accept that even wilderness places contain multiple and conflicting histories and that people affirm in such places multiple and conflicting identities. The accelerated pace of change (globalization) helps us to see more clearly that much of what we thought was inherent and enduring is really socially constructed. In addition, there is practical value to understanding how places are socially constructed and contested. Much of what I see as the post-utilitarian challenge for natural resource management grows out of the increasingly contested meanings of places and ecosystems that come with modernity and globalization. Understanding the processes of making and contesting wilderness meanings gets at the heart of natural resource conflict. The social constructionist perspective draws attention to the idea that the work of environmental scientists, managers, and planners is itself an effort that seeks, creates, contests, and most importantly, negotiates the meaning of places. As planners this means moving away from top-down, data and expert driven management styles and toward more deliberative, discursive, collaborative styles. Stated more globally, we need to learn how to collectively negotiate through change and across differences. This is much easier said than done, of course, as societies have structured all manner of processes and institutions around single histories, defined boundaries, fixed categories, and reified meanings.

Regardless of how one feels about the “cultural politics” that globalization engenders and intensifies (and the corresponding reduction in the power and authority of science and expertise), such politics are part of the social reality. It is perhaps tempting to think that the meaning and value of wilderness should be defined by an elite of scientists and well-informed activists. We would like to discover some “rational” foundation for protecting wilderness that transcends local cultural truths. But an examination of wilderness in the circumpolar north reinforces the role of culture in shaping the very concept of wilderness. In the north, it is more difficult to disregard the role of indigenous people and traditional practices in making and remaking the landscape. The western tendency to segment lands into the universalist categories of civilized and uncivilized are much less tenable. But it is equally impossible to pretend that the universalizing discourses of western landscape meanings have no bearing on northern landscapes. Wilderness uses, meanings, and values are constructed through the ongoing contest between indigenous, touristic, and ecological discourses and practices. Wilderness in the north *is* an continuing amalgamation of these and other social forces.

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