



SHIFTING FOREST PERCEPTIONS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF FOREST PERCEPTIONS IN YUKON CANADA AND THE TUCHOLA FOREST REGION OF POLAND

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In this article we present research that took place in two separate forest regions, the southern Yukon Territory, Canada, and the Tuchola Forest region of Poland¹. Though undertaken separately, the authors discovered that a linking concept in both projects was that forests were the subject of numerous and shifting perceptions by locals. As a means of better understanding this similarity we examine the nature of forest through exploring and comparing local forest perceptions in both regions. In particular we focus on ambiguous or seemingly contradictory representations of forests: shifting perceptions over time, their representation as both wild and tame, as human and natural, known and unknown, and as symbols of the past and future.

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In both Canada and Poland forests are powerful national symbols, are home to many people, constitute an economic and natural resource, and are an important component of local ecosystems. While singular in image, they encompass any number of experiences, events, ideologies and viewpoints. In their multifaceted ability to meet the needs of people, their perception and use reveals as much about the people interested in them as about forests themselves. Forests we suggest, are an ideal ethnographic focus which can be employed in order to better understand local culture and diversity.

The Polish component of this research took place in the Tuchola Forest ethnographic region (Bory Tucholskie). This area constitutes the biggest woodland in the country and has allowed the emergence and the development of a unique, regional group: Borowiacy Tucholscy. The Canadian component of this paper took place in the southern Yukon Territory of north western Canada. The boreal forests of this region have been home to First Nations for thousands of years, and it is only in the last one hundred and fifty years that Euro-Canadian influence has been substantial.

These two case studies could not be more divergent. The Yukon Territory, though only a small corner of Canada, is substantially larger than the entirety of Poland, yet it's population remains under 40 000 people (compared to Poland's 38, 500 000: GŁÓWNY URZĄD STATYSTYCZNY 2012, p. 6). Yukon's forests are often depicted as pristine and wild, (though perhaps incorrectly so), and its forest history is little documented. In comparison, Poland's forests are well documented and have been an important part of the country and its economy since at least the Middle Ages. Unlike the Yukon, Polish forests are understood as dominated by human activity and its administration; and only a small part of it – Białowieża Forest (Puszcza Białowieska) is considered ancient woodland, one of the last primeval forests in Europe (SOKOŁOWSKI 1930; RYBAK ed. 2004–2005; GIZAK 2012, p. 12–13).

Despite this diversity, strong similarities are found in how locals make sense of and use forests in both regions. Like many forest areas, in both regions environmental conditions have meant that the life of residents has been linked with forest in many ways. This is visible not only in local economy and material culture but as we will show, also in local meaning making and feelings of belonging. In both cases these forests have been a key resource in the livelihood of all residents, providing fuel, food, shelter, and more recently tourism money. Perhaps most importantly for this paper, forests have been a stable component in regions that have undergone enormous change in the past two centuries.

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF FOREST

The form and character of a local landscape influences local activities, movements, and what resources are available. While many factors other than environmental influence local cultural and social reality, the specificity of place is a result of convolution of factors, in which nature plays a key role (GRAD 2000, p. 17). From this perspective, forest can allow us a window through which we can view society and changes which happen within it (SYCHTA 1998, p. 141). The cultural values of these places are visible not only in trees and bushes (which are often time affected by

human activity) (ZAJĄCZKOWSKA 2000) but also in material artifacts of human life like cemeteries, trails, cabins, crosses and shrines (MARSZAŁEK 2010, p. 249; ŁYSIAK 2010, p. 209–316).

This work contributes to a growing body of literature that explores the human-environment relationship using forests as a focal point. Anthropologist Thomas Dunk reminded us that "...the forest is not merely a place for working or playing. It is the raw material out of which the meaningful universe that is human culture is constructed." (1994, p. 256). Forests are both literal and metaphorical meeting points for social, economic, environmental, and cultural issues. Far more than just a human construct however, forests play a key role in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems around the world, sustain animal, bird, and insect populations, and are integral components of water and air filtration. On yet another level, many increasingly argue that forests and green areas in general can be important for physical and mental health (DEVRIES et al, 2003; WELLS 2003). While often singular in image, forests encompass any number of experiences, events, ideologies, and viewpoints while also sustaining an important environmental role separate from humans entirely.

While there is not an established sub-discipline concerning an anthropology of forests, research focusing on the people who live within forests, depend upon them, and concern themselves with them has been long present in the discipline (for example DOUGLAS 1963; TURNBULL 1968; TURNER 1967; NELSON 1973; RIVAL 1998). More recent works relating to Canada and Poland, include DUNK 1994, 1998; SATTERFIELD 2002; MAIN-JOHNSON 2000; GWIAZDOWICZ, WIŚNIEWSKI 2011; KIEŁCZEWSKI, WIŚNIEWSKI 2004. Consistent in such forest studies is a preoccupation with how people understand and relate to forests and what role they play in the lives of locals. Though diverse in focus, anthropological forest studies together create a growing source of literature concerning an aspect of nature that is found around the world and that supports the livelihoods of many peoples. Such research is very much an exploration of humanity through a focus on one environmental feature: forests.

At the moment, anthropological forest studies are particularly timely and necessary considering the increasing concern over the state of the worlds' forests, a fact emphasised by the United Nations General Assembly declaring 2011 the International Year of the Forest. Furthermore the 1992 United Nations Council on Environment and Development, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF), and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) all emphasise that the health and state of world forests is an increasing global concern.

Our approach in this paper has been to explore the ambiguity present in local forest discourse and experience as a means of better understanding similarities in forest perception in two distinct forested locations. In part this has meant an exploration of how forests have been conceptualized through time. Others have taken a similar approach. For instance, Dunk (1994) in Canada, Fairhead and Leach (1996) in Guinea, and Tuck-Po (2005) in Malaysia all have traced forests and their shifting meaning. Similarly, Oliver Rackham (1990) has traced the formation and conceptualization of treed areas through time in Britain. Beginning as early as 11 000 BC, Rackham looks at the use of trees by different people and generations, exposing the creation

of what he refers to as pseudo-histories. Rackham urges researchers to see the landscape itself as an aid in understanding history, and to refrain from underestimating the changes in viewpoint that can be brought on by passing years.

These changes in viewpoint are in part because of the spatial ambiguity forests lend themselves towards. They are often experienced in contradictory ways, for instance, as places of freedom, an open space where people can think clearly, rest and find a sense of solitude. Yet at the same time, forests deny a sense of space: they make it impossible to see the horizon, trees limit movement and at times can evoke feelings of being overwhelmed and lost (TUAN 1987, HARRIS 1992.) Forest can be a place to look for happiness, a refuge for deserters, and remedy for social problems (WENERSKA 2000, p. 361; ŚMIAŁOWSKI 2002, p. 521). Yet forests are also often thought of as a kingdom of wildness where people are not in their place (GRAD 2000, p. 24).

While academics might question the human/environment relationship and the degree to which people are part of, or separate from nature (ASSELIN 2013b, INGOLD 2000, CAROLAN 2005), the participants of this study, most often of western decent, often drew a line between cities, towns, and settlements where people belonged, and forests where people visited. While the very real and material reality of forests are key in local cultures in both case studies, forests are also creatively defined, imagined and experienced by locals. It is through exploring these aspects, that much can be learned about local society and human/environment relations.

THE TUCHOLA FOREST CASE

The material relating to the Tuchola Forest emerged from fieldwork that took place between the summer of 2010 and the spring of 2012. Research concentrated on Tuchola County (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship) with particular reference to district Cekcyn (KONCZAL 2012). The main research goal was to explore how local people understood and perceived forests. In particular, research focused on the scope of changes and transformations that are connected with the evolution of the forest's role in the Tuchola region. In total, fifteen recorded interviews and at least 15 unrecorded interviews were conducted with residents of the Tuchola Forest ethnographical region. Three important groups of respondents were identified: foresters; activists in local organizations, and middle age and older residents who are not classified in both above groups but who were born and spent their life in the area. These interviews are the primary source of information for this article.

The Tuchola Forest is one of the largest forest stands in Poland and Central Europe. Created during the last glacial age, it is located in the Northern part of Poland, in the Central European climate zone. The forest covers over 3 thousands square kilometres, in the regions of the Sandur's Brda and Wda Rivers' basins, and the plains of Tuchola and Charzykowy. In the past, beech and pine forests were most common, and oak, hornbeam, aspen and linden were often present. However, due to an intensive economy and a quickly developing wood industry, pine is starting to dominate. This is largely due to the monoculture of the pinewoods that is common practice today (95% of forests are pine) (BOIŃSKI 1985, p. 15–19).

It can be said that the Tuchola Forest is as “blank gap” in a map of Polish ethnographic research. One of the reasons for this is that neither the region nor local ethnographic group is expansive. Furthermore, ethnologists have focused most often on the neighbouring regions of Kashubia and Kociewie, who are therefore better known and described (particularly Kashubia). Terminology has also been a barrier to studying this region. While Bory Tucholskie (Tuchola Forest, or Tuchola Pinewoods) is a term which is used by many researchers, it can be used to refer to different areas. In effect, this term is used to describe a variety of parts of Pomerania. For the purpose of this article, the area of interest is based on a map of the ethnographic region of the Tuchola Forest created by Bernard Sychta in his “Material culture of the Tuchola Forest” which covers the following towns and villages: Bysław, Bysławek, Cekcyn Polski, Czersk, Drzycin, Jeżewo, Legbąd, Lniano, Lubiewo, Łąg, Odry, Osie, Osiek, Osieczna, Rytel, Szlachta, Śliwice, Tuchola, Wda and Zdroje (SYCHTA 1998, p. 22).

The Tuchola region has always been defined and recognized by its deep links with forests. Its well documented history shows that forests have been important to the local economy since the time of the first settlers. For instance, this is visible in materials from the time of the Teutonic Knights from the XIII and XIV century (GRZEGORZ 2005, p. 105). However, there has been little attention given to the influence of the forest beyond material life. For example, the subjects of current transformations, local beliefs and memory are completely omitted. Over the centuries, the ways in which locals use and perceive the forest have been continuously negotiated over time. Thus, we cannot talk about an integral, constant stand of pinewoods. We have to think about the forest as a construct of the local society and culture, which are continually transforming together.

Most of the time, residents of the Tuchola Forest are surrounded by pinewoods and yet they do not perceive those areas as a space of their natural and normal activity. Because the soil was not fertile and gave very low harvests, Borowiacy Tucholscy had to turn to the forest and its resources. As a result a substantial part of local residents’ income came (and still comes) from work in the woods. Gathering mushrooms, berries and cranberries, herbs and plants, lumbering, and obtaining fuel, are activities which were mentioned by many interlocutors. However, extended activity in the forest did not lead to a sense of domestication of the space. On the one hand, the forest is a source of survival which provides food, wood and shelter but on the other it is a place of mystery, a domain of dangerous power and an undaunted kingdom of nature. According to local legends and tales, the space of the pinewood is home to mysterious creatures such as ghosts and devils who can hurt or even kill (REGLIŃSKI 2006, PUCHOWSKI, RAGIN-SZCZĘSNA ed. 2012). One of the most characteristic local figures is *dzika jachta*, a herd of ghosts-hunters and ghost-animals, who are invisible but very loud. They race on the tops of trees and on the middle of forestry tracks and can kill everyone who stands in their way.

In this region, the sense is that people can use the forest but it is not under their control. It exists in opposition to the well-known tame space of home and neighbourhood where interference of the supernatural is limited by protective actions such as drawing apotropaic signs on doors and into houses (a well-known example is “C+M+B” during the day of the Epiphany) or keeping ordained plants and herbs.

However, the forest is also often chosen as a place of rest and prayer. Most of the interlocutors in this project declared that they found silence and calm there, and that they went to the forest when they needed to think about important issues or to solve their problems. They also often expressed that they felt a closer bond with the world of plants, especially trees, than with the world of animals. One woman who was interviewed, said that she always went to the forest when she was sad, depressed, ill or when she wanted to be alone and needed to pray. She had her favourite birch-tree, which she hugged and there she left her sadness. She said that trees give her strength. As shown by such examples, the forest is often personified and is considered as a living being (a popular sentence, “The Forest welcomes you and people entertain”, in Polish: “Las Was przywita a ludzie ugoscza”, clearly expresses this perspective).

Yet the pinewoods of the Tuchola Forest are not only a place for praying and finding peace. It is space that requires building an internal protection through special behaviors, recitation of prayers and calling on the help of saints. Many interviewees mentioned that they used special prayers, made signs or crosses, or requested the help of patron saints before entering the pinewoods. Konczal recorded a unique, local prayer: “I am going into the woods, taking the belt of Virgin Mary with me. I will encircle this belt round my waist three times, and this belt will scare all the bad, cruel people and vermin away”. Everything indicates that this prayer has pre-Christian roots and is connected with a figure of local deity of the forest – aunt of Borowiacy’s – who is a local guardian of nature and animals. Overtime, the figure of Virgin Mary replaced aunt of Borowiacy’s, but the sense and meaning of this short prayer is still the same: local people are not safe in the forest and therefore require special protection.

In the region of the Tuchola Forest, the wood is in many ways a carrier of local history. Within it we can find marks of both past and contemporary human activity. For instance, cemeteries and religious elements such as small crosses and shrines on trees are common. Cemeteries are generally residues of the evangelical society from the middle of the XIX century or of single graves of unnamed soldiers from the Second World War. Today they are destroyed and neglected (though since the year 2000 efforts are being made to renovate and clear forest cemeteries) and in most cases they are only a reminder of the past residents of this region. In turn, crosses and shrines are also proof of local folk religions. They are left in important places and commemorate events from the life of community or individuals, many of them having a protective function. Simultaneously, they can be a simple proof of existence of people whose history has been forgotten such as in the village Trzebnica, where a cross was found on a tree though no residents remember who left it or why.

The local history is also heavily entwined with forestry. Since its beginning, the sylvan economy has left traces and transformed local forests. Examples of such traces are forestry boundary markers with numbers of territories (which take the form of small, stone columns) and colourful signs on trees with information about their age, condition and destined purpose. Another very unique witness of the past are the hacks and indentations in the trunks which are a results of resin extraction, though today this kind of activity is all but forgotten.

A forest is not constant in its form and is a resource in which people find meaning and purpose. Many changes in how pinewoods are used took place in the Tuchola Forest region during XX and in the beginning of XXI century. This in turn led to changes in their social and economic value. First, as a result of technical development and the modernization of forestry, local woods became more available for the larger economy. During this time, forests have come to be perceived as more dependent on people rather than on nature. The scale of dominance has tipped on the side of people, who by means of new equipment and digitization, have mastered its manifestations by entering the mysterious and unknown spheres which, in the traditional culture, were inaccessible to the local people. Thus, the space has been rationalized. Second, earlier dangerous and sinister creatures and residents of the forest were transformed into funny and benevolent members of legends and tales which are part of the image presented to promote local tourism. This is visible in local publications (PUCHOWSKI, RAGIN-SZCZĘSNA eds. 2012), tourist pamphlets, seasonal performances for tourists, and even in district logos. The forest is now a main financial attraction of the districts and province, much like the work in the woods or agriculture of earlier times. In this case, the forest has to be presented as friendly, quiet, and gentle; it should be a place where tourists can find calm and peace, and contact with benevolent nature.

THE SOUTHERN YUKON FOREST CASE

Material Concerning the Yukon Territory of Canada was collected as part of a doctoral project through the University of Alberta. During fieldwork which took place primarily in 2009, 58 Yukon residents who were connected to Yukon forests in a variety of ways were interviewed. Such forest users included those who hunt, fish, trap, and work in forests, as well as those who recreate or are driven to preserve and protect them from human use. These individuals were connected to forests throughout the Yukon, ranging from recreational trail users to forestry workers and surveyors who had visited and lived in many remote areas of the Territory. Primary research goals included documenting diverse forest perspectives in the region, as well as tracing the origins of that diversity.

Yukon Territory is Canada's most north western territory. It has a variety of ecosystems, with the southern arctic in the north and the boreal cordillera in the south. Forests are generally found on valley bottoms, and because of this, denser forests are most often found following rivers and streams. Southeast Yukon has the largest diversity of tree species as well as the largest trees, while the west and north tree stands tend to be more open and discontinuous (SMITH et al. 2006). The most common tree species are white and black spruce, pine and aspen. The Yukon Territory has a population of roughly 35, 800 people, 76% of whom reside in the capital city of Whitehorse (YUKON BUREAU OF STATISTICS 2011). While the two largest cities, Whitehorse and Dawson City, are home to a majority of non-aboriginal people, within most communities Aborigines are a majority.

Despite a rich natural and social history, Yukon forests are often depicted in tourism ads and conservation campaigns as pristine nature. The desire to find untouched

nature in a time where the state of the environment is a major concern has led to new readings, as well as the continuation of old and inaccurate readings, of the Yukon landscape. For example, the following is part of an advertisement in a British newspaper sponsored by the Yukon Government. Visitors are encouraged to visit the Yukon, 'Canada's Pristine Gem'. The article states:

Imagine yourself in a land where the sounds of nature reach your ears; where there is unspoiled wilderness farther than the eye can see; and where for miles your only neighbours sport fur or feathers. This is the Yukon. Emblazoned with a rich scenic tapestry of soaring, snow-capped peaks, boreal forests, sweeping tundra, glacier-fed rivers and abundant wildlife, Canada's Yukon is one of North America's major wilderness attractions, with close to 80 per cent remaining pristine landscape... (COWTON 2011)

A feeling of freedom, untouched space and solitude are major components of how many people have, and still do, encounter nature in the Yukon. More than just a tourism campaign, such images and ideas are internalized and felt strongly by locals who understand their connection to the Territory, and their motivation for remaining, as resting on such sentiments. The following sentiments from interviews were common among those Yukon residents who felt local forests were primarily pristine.

It gives you a sense of relief if there is a place that is just the way it has been and can continue to be and change of its own accord.

I think it is because it is one of the last places in the world where there really is wilderness... I think if you travel much you realise how priceless this land is, you hardly ever see a fence in the Yukon, there are not many places like that. Miles and miles of wilderness.

Despite such feelings however, Yukon forests are far from untouched and empty. In fact, many areas that are today thought of as pristine wilderness were not so long ago cleared land; this is particularly true for forests along important rivers and streams, as well as near communities. The Territory's modern forest industry has its origins in the late XIX century Klondike gold rush. In 1896, a discovery of a substantial amount of gold on the Klondike River marked the beginning of what would become Yukon's gold-rush era. Previous to this period, non-First Nations residents had been few, slowly rising from 50 to 1,000 between 1882 and 1894 (COATES & MORRISON 2005). However, far from being pristine, forests of this time had already undergone many human-induced changes. Aboriginal peoples had been living and thriving in the area for several thousand years (MORSE 2003; CRUIKSHANK 2005; COATES & MORRISON 2005). Aboriginal people were hunters and gatherers and had modified the landscape to aid their needs. Previous to European arrival, vast trading networks were already in place between coastal and interior groups (COATES 1991) and Yukon's first inhabitants had set fires to forests in order to control mosquitos and to attract animals such as bear and moose that would forage on the young shoots of post fire growth (MORSE 2003).

When as many as 40,000 prospective miners arrived the year after the Klondike River gold discovery in 1896, it forever changed the region's social and physical character (COATES & MORRISON 2005). Aboriginal people, trappers, and traders

depended on the animals and timber products within forests, and when gold was discovered, wood also began to be used heavily for steamer traffic along the main routes and for mining infrastructure and processes. The effects of deforestation were far reaching, not the least of which were the problems of frequent floods, and creeks and rivers being clogged with heavy run-off from nearby bare hills and mountains (MORSE 2003). Though the Klondike gold rush was short lived, intensive wood use during this period would be felt for many years. WEBB (1985) reports that in many areas demand was high enough that most wood companies in operation along the Yukon River had to move camps every year to ensure their supply continued.

The furore over the Klondike calmed within a decade and Yukon's timber needs declined. However, Yukon has continued to have a small but steady timber industry characterised by brief periods of intensive activity. Today, Yukon's forest industry could be labeled as small, with only two operational mills and a shifting number of back-yard operators who supply fuel wood, value added products, and dimensional timber. The small though consistent timber industry of the Yukon has been well suited to the needs of local residents and has been an important component of a northern way of life and economy.

However, it is also a relatively unknown history. In articulating forest perceptions, competing claims are apparent among participants regarding the character of Yukon forests, many of which are grounded in specific readings of local history. Among non-indigenous residents on whom research was focused, the underlying foundation of many of these divergent forest views is an understanding of Yukon forests as either essentially stable and untouched on any measurable scale, or as influenced and shaped by humans. Many loggers, outfitters and trappers who work in the bush on a regular basis told stories of coming across old trails, logged areas, abandoned cabins, survey sites or other signs of human occupation or influence. For instance, one trapper told a story of coming across a scarred tree that had been marked by a fellow trapper or traveler over eighty years earlier. For these forest users, such singular stories emphasise the role of people in shaping the landscape.

During the mid-century, an increased regulation of animal harvest, and an increasing southern concern in both northern conservation and development, meant that the federally-controlled Territory was increasingly becoming part of a wider network of influences and priorities. For example, McCANDLESS (1976) argues that during the post-WW II influx of new voices in which southern Canadian immigration began to grow, local value was replaced by one imposed from the outside, and which was backed by the force of law. Forests as spaces to be used for the necessities of daily life began to be overshadowed as forests as spaces of recreation and retreat. This shift has had lasting impacts on how contemporary Yukoners understand the value of forests and of the Yukon more generally. It created a divide that is still apparent today between those who feel Yukon forests should be used and appreciated through extraction activities (such as hunting and logging) and those who feel its best use is non-intrusive.

Throughout Yukon's history, forests have been viewed from many different vantage points. They were a barrier to settlement for the first outsiders who came to look for furs or gold. Later they were an important resource for mining operations

(MORSE 2003) and an important source of employment. They are imagined by locals as endless, unbounded and wild, while at the same time are subject to numerous regulations concerning hunting, fishing, building, and using motor vehicles all of which imbue the forest experience with the taste of bureaucracy. Many local hikers and environmentalists express a sense of freedom and joy while in forests, yet frustration was often expressed during interviews by hunters, trappers and loggers, who felt that such individuals underestimate the inherent dangers of nature. Forest, while referred to deceptively easily in the Yukon in one sweeping term, are not the same place for all who depend upon them. They are multiple places at once, require skill to navigate, and are a key component of Yukon livelihood and character.

DISCUSSION

In exploring how forests are articulated and experienced, we are given a window from which to understand a sense of locality, place, and meaning-making in two distinct regions. A strong thread in both cases is that even though these forests may be human-influenced, they are not domesticated. They can, in the case of the Tuchola Forest, still be a place of mystery, and in the case of the Yukon, still be experienced as untouched and wild. For all the human presence within them, throughout the thousands of years they have been utilized and lived within, something about them remains external to the human world. In this way forests are perceived of as both wild and tame. They are a place of work, resting, recreation, and because of these activities are known and familiar. Yet on the other hand, they are an area which locals cannot be totally acquainted with. These are places of people and nature and a mixing of the two. In the Yukon, many loggers and trappers made a case that their actions were natural, that their movements should be compared to those of other animals who moved within and took what they needed from forests. At the same time, the fact that forests were the domain of nature, as separate from people all together was a constant theme in both regions. A line of difference existed between people and forests, no matter how many ways it had been crossed.

In both cases we can also see that perceptions have shifted over time, how forests were defined and experienced in both Yukon and Poland changed with local social and economic reality. Today the desires of non-locals have once again redefined the meaning of these areas through the guise of tourism. In a similar way national sentiment has clung to these areas, built an identity around them, and in turn redefined how they are experienced and perceived of. As constant as forests have been in these regions, through focusing on how humans have encountered and in some ways constructed them allows us to view society itself. HARRISON (1992) in tracing the role of forests in society wrote:

...when we look into the forests – at what happens in them, at how they get represented, at their allegorical implications – we see a strange reflection of the order to which they remained external. From this external perspective the institutional world reveals its absurdity, or corruption, or contradictions, or arbitrariness, or even its virtues. But one way or another it

reveals something essential about itself which often remains invisible or inaccessible to the internal perspective (HARRISON 1992, p. 63).

Yet forests are not entirely a social construct. There is something in their nature that lends itself towards these readings, that explains the similarities in both case studies. BLOCH (1998) has explored the symbolism of trees and concludes that they have characteristics that invite a symbolic interpretation. Their sap, limbs, roots and longevity act as a stand-in for humans and provide a sense of similarity through which people may come to view themselves. Within this is an allowance of contradiction, of ambiguity, ample space for numerous definitions and narratives to take hold. For instance, trees are alive and have the capacity to live longer than humans. Because of this they have an ability to incorporate human induced change and to facilitate drawing connections between one living society and another in a way that leaves them open to hold the past and future at once. Very much connected to this, is the tendency of forests to act as anchors for stories of the past and possibilities for the future. Changes over time make physical marks upon them, their shape when planted by people, their form when impacted by animals, their size and height when once burned or cut, their species make-up, their very existence hold stories of what people have and have not done to them and of what nature itself has done. In both Yukon and Poland marks left on trees from those long gone, told stories to those who came across them and provided a sense of belonging and place. In this way trees anchor stories through their physical presence, allowing people who contemplate, use or come into contact with them, to think of the future or past in a manner at once grounded and unbounded.

Forests in these regions also provide the resources necessary for the daily lives of people. Directly as income, wood, food and shelter, and indirectly as a means to clean water, animal habitat, and healthy ecosystem functioning. While the resources and activities that forests sustain vary greatly, the ability of forest to provide some aspect of daily needs as well as a source for certain economic and social structures, means that human-forest interaction is necessarily deliberate and involved. The ability of people to draw similarities between trees and themselves or their community, means that they are often integrated into life through discourse and conceptualisation of human relations, as well as through ritual, religion, and symbolism.

Like nature, the idea of what a forest is, and what it should be used for, is often debated and as a consequence forests are more often than not contested spaces. A study of forest perception in this sense is a study of the human-environment relationship as understood through one aspect of nature; it is an enquiry into how humans understand the non-human world and of the impact that such an understanding can have on our social and cultural reality.

CONCLUSION

Both research projects are examples of how the landscape can be approached as an ethnographic tool, used as a focus point from which to understand the people who depend upon local natural resources in one way or another. We have

argued that through such a focus, and through drawing comparisons between countries, regions, and communities, we can learn not only about local ways of living and meaning-making, but of how people and nature relate more generally. In focusing on forests in this way, we are also questioning the uncontested nature of the field-site and exploring alternative understandings of local place. Doing so is a step towards a more complete representation of forests and those who dwell within them.

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SHIFTING FOREST PERCEPTIONS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF FOREST PERCEPTIONS IN YUKON CANADA AND THE TUCHOLA FOREST REGION OF POLAND

S u m m a r y

This article draws comparison between two forest communities, in Canada and Poland, through exploring the idea of forest as an ambiguous space within which sometimes conflicting local histories, beliefs, priorities, and needs can be negotiated. Many forests characteristics facilitate diverse forest perceptions among those who depend upon them, including their long life, which allows them to be at once, symbols for the future and past. Though the two forested areas are quite different, one having a long and well documented human history, the other being primarily defined through its lack of history, in both cases locals negotiate forests as both known and unknown space, wild and tame, material anchors for history and potential for the future, and as increasingly defined and imagined by shifting local values such as tourism. On a broader level, this work argues that forests are a solid starting point from which we can understand the communities who depend upon them.

Key words: forest perceptions, human/environment relations, Southern Yukon, Tuchola Forest, ethnography

**ZMIANY POSTRZEGANIA PRZESTRZENI LEŚNEJ:
STUDIUM PORÓWNAWCZE PERCEPCJI LASU W YUKONIE (KANADA)
I BORACH TUCHOLSKICH (POLSKA)**

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje porównanie dwóch leśnych kompleksów – w Kanadzie (Południowy Yukon) i Polsce (Bory Tucholskie) oraz ich społeczności, przy wykorzystaniu idei niejednoznaczności przestrzeni leśnej, dzięki której pewne, czasami sprzeczne lokalne historie, wierzenia, wartości i potrzeby mogą być negocjowane i uzgadniane. Wiele cech lasu pozwala na określenie różnorodnego postrzegania go przez tych, którzy od niego zależą – jak na przykład jego długowieczność, która decyduje o tym, że las jest symbolem zarówno przeszłości, jak i przyszłości. Mimo że opisywane regiony bardzo się różnią (jeden ma długą i dobrze udokumentowaną historię ludzkiej aktywności, drugi definiowany jest przez jej brak), to w obu las postrzegany jest jako przestrzeń zarówno znana, jak i nieznaną, dzika i oswojona, nośnik historii i potencjalnej przyszłości. W obu przypadkach dostrzec można także znaczące wpływy np. turystyki w procesie wartościowania i określania znaczenia przestrzeni leśnej. Na wyższym poziomie w artykule tym założono, że las może być kluczem do zrozumienia społeczności żyjących w jego cieniu, tak jak ma to miejsce w Borach Tucholskich czy Południowym Yukonie.

Słowa kluczowe: percepcja lasu, relacje człowiek – środowisko, Południowy Yukon, Bory Tucholskie, etnografia