Project organisation and objectives

"wa'gen" (Wald = forest and gender) is a joint research project of the German Universities of Lüneburg and Freiburg. It focuses on the role that gender relations and perceptions of nature have on forestry and environmental education. Main questions are:

- Which influence have perceptions of nature on forestry organizations, the practice of forestry and the transfer of knowledge in the field of forestry?
- Which influence have perceptions of nature and forests on gender relations in forestry organizations?
- How can we recognize gender-specific aspects and how can we incorporate these into knowledge transfer, into the management of forests and into the organization of the state forest services?

Research objectives:

- Approaches for successful gender mainstreaming in forest services
- To overcome gender specific assignations and exclusions
- Knowledge on consequences of forestry reform processes on education, nature perception and gender relations
- Reflection of the conceptual perceptions of forestry and nature
- To analyse relations between gender and transfer of knowledge in forestry

Work packages 1/2 (Lüneburg University):
- Gender sensitive environmental education
- Work packages 3a/b (Freiburg University):
  - Forest services as a male domain
  - Nature knowledge and experience in forests under consideration: gender analysis of forest related environmental education, information and public relation work - new approaches

Gender in German forestry: an example

The gender situation in the German forest services is exemplified by the proportions of male and female graduates in a German Forestry School in the last 50 years (fig. 2). From 1954 till 1972 the School educated foresters employed by the Baden-Württemberg state forest service. No women were admitted in this period. In 1973 the school gained the status of a university of applied science ("internal college"). From then till 1998 students were recruited exclusively from the state forest services of Baden-Württemberg, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland and from the federal forest services. The first females graduated in 1979. Since then, an average of 10 % of the graduates was female. Since the mid-nineties, job opportunities in the state forest services declined dramatically, continuing till today. From 1998 on, the university has an open admission policy ("open college"). Nowadays, 20 to 25 % of the students are female. In combination with the difficult employment situation, the forest services in essence remain a male domain.

Gender research in project “wa’gen”

To understand current gender relations, patterns of corporate culture in state forest services will be identified and analyzed, using an historical approach to reconstruct underlying mechanisms. We assume that these patterns not only led and still lead to the exclusion of women, but also to an utilitarian view of nature, both restricting the potential for change. This approach will be complemented with the study of current gender relations in the forest services, with the help of theories and methods of organizational sociology. The processes of daily work and communication will be reconstructed by means of qualitative interviews. The results of both approaches will then be used for workshops to improve sensitivity for gender issues in selected groups within the forest services.

For more information on the project, see www.wa-gen.de.

Fig. 1: The organisation of project “wa’gen”

Fig. 2: Proportions of male and female graduates from the Applied Forestry School of Rottenburg from 1954 till 2004 (Source: B. Kaiser, Rottenburg)

At Lüneburg University, the main focus is on the perceptions of nature and gender, respectively, on the one hand and the dialectics of occupational images and their reality in environmental education, on the other hand. — At Freiburg University, research is focused on gender proportions and gender relations against the background of the stated political goal of equal opportunities for both sexes and the ongoing structural reform of the state forest services. The project also aims specifically at developing recommendations for a gender-sensitive implementation of the ongoing reform processes in the forest services.