

Growing Places: Forestry as an Engine for Social Development in The National Forest

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on the results of a recent social scientific research project in The National Forest in the UK. The broad aim of the research was to investigate the link between changes to the natural environment (restoration/landscape change through afforestation) and the changing lives of people who live, work and spend their leisure time in the Forest area. In this paper we present evidence of the strong linkages between landscape change and a developing Forest ‘sociality’, with forested places providing the setting for the reconfiguration of social networks and the emergence of new forms of ‘connectedness’. In short, we argue that not only trees, but also communities are growing in The National Forest.

We go on to explore some of the implications of this reconfiguration of social capital, as indicated by the research findings. Firstly, we argue that getting involved with forest-related activities, projects and initiatives can bring tangible social and economic, as well as environmental benefits. With reference to respondents’ accounts of their own involvement in various forest-related activities we show how social cohesion and mental and physical health benefits represent some important contributions made by The National Forest project. Secondly, we draw attention to the way in which the Forest itself is an active player in shaping new social arrangements. In particular, we present evidence that specific forms of social interaction within places, and physical interaction with places, might be crystallising a sense of care for the environment that feeds into negotiations of a normative code that, in turn, governs the behaviour of forest users. In this sense, the Forest

is not only bringing about changes to the area’s landscape but also to its ‘valuescape’.

The paper ends by highlighting some of the ways in which forestry can contribute to the social (as well as environmental and economic) development of an area, and we close by suggesting that ‘measurements’ of these social contributions should be included within assessments of the sustainability of forestry initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents some of the key findings from a recent social science research project conducted in the UK’s National Forest. The research, which took place in 2005, represents a partnership between Lancaster University’s Sociology Department, the UK Forestry Commission (FC), and The National Forest Company (NFC). The main author now works in the Social and Economics Research Group within Forest Research, the research agency of the Forestry Commission. The full report: ‘*Growing Places: A Study of Social Change in The National Forest*’ is due to be published in the Social and Economics Research Group’s publication series (Morris & Urry, in prep.)

The starting point for the *Growing Places* research project was the recognition that ‘The National Forest is a place that seems to be ‘on the move’¹ – the area’s physical environment has dramatically changed in recent years, property prices are rising, people are moving into the area, unemployment figures are falling, visitor numbers are on the up, the area is attracting inward

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investment and, in general, local support is strong. The National Forest's 'mobility' is also indicated in two recent pieces of research. First, an assessment of the socio-economic impacts of The National Forest by Staffordshire University's Centre for Economic and Social Regeneration lists amongst some of the direct and indirect effects of National Forest actions: more positive outlooks within businesses and communities, emerging visions for future sustainable regeneration, employment creation and safeguarding in forestry, conservation and tourism, evidence of successful farm business diversification, a healthier property market, and a growth in the number and average spend of visitors to the area (Ball, 2004). Second, a Cardiff University study of the relationship between forestry and social inclusion, points to The National Forest's success both in terms of regenerating derelict land, and in terms of changing public awareness and identities, allowing the fostering of suitable conditions for the alleviation of social exclusion (Kitchen et al. forthcoming).

Growing Places represents a further examination of these changes, and grows out of an ongoing relationship between the FC and Lancaster University and is preceded by various research projects and activities. Research funded by the Forestry Commission and conducted by the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC) in the late 1990s applied new understandings of social, cultural and environmental issues to a study of public attitudes towards, and uses of, British woodland (Macnaghten et al. 1998). Building on this, Macnaghten and Urry re-visited data from the 1998 study to show how trees and woods actively shape people's embodied experiences of forested areas (2001a; 2001b). More recently, another CSEC research project reviewed changing patterns of use, governance, and public participation within UK forestry (Weldon, 2003).

Growing Places, based in the newly-formed Centre for Mobilities Research (CeMoRe), builds on this body of research. At the Project's inception, it was envisaged that work in The National Forest might reveal ways in which this innovative and progressive model of social forestry was resulting, not only in the growth of trees, but also in the growth of communities. It is in this double sense that the title for the project was intended. Such a

project would not only throw up some interesting topics for future academic research, but would also help the FC and the NFC in pioneering a re-imagining and re-location of forested places as engines for sustainable development with a particular emphasis on the delivery of social benefits.

This paper draws on the research findings to highlight some of the key ways in which the National Forest is contributing to the social development of the area. Section 1 focuses on the strong linkages between landscape change and a developing Forest 'sociality', with forested places providing the setting for the reconfiguration of social networks and new forms of 'connectedness'. Section 2 goes on to explore some of the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with these emerging forms of community. In this section we also present evidence that the Forest itself is a kind of 'active player' in these emerging social arrangements. The paper concludes with an overview of the social benefits delivered by the Forest, as highlighted by the *Growing Places* research. These concluding remarks are intended to raise the question of how to include social issues in assessments of sustainable forest management and policies.

METHODS

Growing Places represents a predominantly qualitative study of social change in the Forest. Rather than trying to infer the possible social results of landscape change from various socio-economic statistics and the evidence provided by informants, this research also aimed to take a brief look at actual processes of landscape and social change themselves as they were played out in the Forest between January and May 2005. *Growing Places* reflects an attempt to analyse meanings and values as evidenced by various forms of situated speech and action. Broadly speaking, the research presents the findings of what could be termed a 'compressed ethnography'² of life in the Forest, involving the researcher being present in 'sites' of speech and action wherein the relationship between physical and social aspects would be played out. In turn, this involved spending time with, and talking to groups and individuals as they engaged

practically in forest-, or non-forest-related activities. These activities included walking, going on site visits, farm work, tree planting, attending meetings, photography, and volunteering. This ethnography was favoured because it meant that responses to the research questions introduced during these activities were contextualised by 'hands-on' experiences of the places within the Forest.

In addition to being present in various sites of speech and action, the researcher also joined in with these activities, becoming not only an observer, but also a participant. Drawing on previous research experience (Morris, 2004), it was felt that by getting practically involved, the researcher would himself be able to experience directly the relationship between people and place.³ So, the researcher not only observed and talked to walkers, but experienced places by walking through them himself, helped gather information on site visits, built bridges and fences, planted trees, participated in meetings, took photographs, and carried out a range of volunteer tasks. This added a further analytical dimension to the research in allowing the researcher to become an active participant in the very processes of constructing and being constructed by the Forest.

As a further dimension of this 'compressed ethnography', 45 formal interviews were conducted with a wide range of respondents. These included people from local groups, clubs and organisations, volunteers, employees from the NFC and the FC, representatives of local government (county, district and parish councils), staff from Regional Development Agencies and their Sub-Regional Strategic Partnerships, local business men and women, and employees from one multinational company. Interviews were individually tailored to each respondent, allowing the researcher to focus in on specific issues and areas of interest. There were, however, topics that were common to most interviews conducted. These included the precise nature of, and reasons behind an organisation's or individual's involvement with the NFC, the uses made of the Forest (personal or organisational), processes of identity forming (personal and organisational), perceptions of change since the Forest's inception in 1995, and views on future development opportunities.

Growing Places presents the results of qualitative research undertaken within a wide range of research settings. Purposive sampling was undertaken. Sample spread was also dictated by the nature of research access to people, organisations, places and activities that were mostly dependent on introductions from NFC and FC staff members. The findings on farming in the National Forest are based on interviews, conversations, and shared activities upon four farms and should not be taken as necessarily representing wider regional trends.

Section 1 – Social capital in The National Forest:

One might expect extensive and radical changes to the physical environment to be the main feature of emerging identities in the Forest. However, our research indicates that interactions between individuals and organisations, and within social groups, are what define peoples' experiences of this changing place. In this section we describe the 'sociality' of the Forest and show how it is evident in activities where different forms of social exchange are the dominant feature.

The research findings strongly indicate that social interactions provide the primary medium through which people experience various places within the Forest. Interestingly, this 'sociality' of experience is not limited to specifically non-forest-related activities, but is also apparent in overtly forest-related activities where one might expect interactions with the physical environment to be central in peoples' responses to interview questions. Volunteers volunteer, for example, primarily because they want to meet new people and/or to share a day with friends:

'I come along every month to catch up with this lot... it's just a good crack, really...'
[Volunteer]

People go on 'Walking the Way to Health' walks 'for the socialising', or 'for the companionship' [Health walkers]. Small and large businesses dedicate resources to forestry-related Corporate Social Responsibility programmes in order to build relations with local communities, to develop employee skills and change outlooks:

‘we’re trying to build something socially within the company.’ [Company employee]

There also seem to be connections between changes to a farm’s physical environment and changes in the dynamic relations between members of the farming family unit. The research indicates that the conversion of land to forestry may sometimes be accompanied by changes to conventional, patriarchal farming family structures (Bennett, 2001, Whatmore, 1991a, 1991b). On two of the farms where fieldwork was conducted, the difficult decision to shift away from conventional farming practices, to diversify the farm business, and to radically alter the farm environment, involved a collective decision between farmer and wife, which then set the tone for on-going farm management. In the words of one farmer’s wife:

‘It was me that pushed him into it... I’ve always been a bit of a green, you know... I’m fascinated by hedges... what’s in them... insects and birds. I couldn’t see the point of producing all that stuff that nobody wants, and putting all those chemicals into the land... that wasn’t good for anybody.’

Another farmer explained:

‘My wife always said ‘marry me, marry my horses’... and now the farm is perfect for her and we’ve got a great little business that’s a real partnership for us. And our daughter works here, too.’

Social interaction is also a very noticeable feature of the organisation and management activities of various organisations in the Forest. The NFC, for example, has become extremely adept at creating and nurturing partnerships with a wide range of institutions, organisations and companies, seeing this as one of the most important aspects of their work:

‘We would be nothing without the huge number of partner organisations we work with... we’ve known that right from the beginning.’ [NFC employee]

These partnerships, furthermore, extend beyond professional bodies to incorporate a host of local individuals, groups and associations who are often closely involved in National Forest projects and

initiatives. One FC staff member, for example, explained that the Commission is completely reliant upon the Sence Valley Volunteer Group for the day-to-day management of Sence Valley Forest Park:

‘They’re our eyes and ears. There’s no way we could run that place without them.’

Another staff member highlighted his reliance upon local groups of enthusiasts to help him with his monitoring work:

‘I very much rely on their assistance to do what I do... it’s a big area and there’s only me.’

The research findings suggest that the Forest seems to be at least partly responsible for the emergence of new forms of social capital.⁴ This is not to suggest that levels of social connectedness are necessarily higher now than in the past. Some respondents, particularly those from the central coalfield area, told of a way of life defined by a strong sense of community (see Dennis et al. 1969, on ‘coal is our life’):

‘...nowadays the men meet in town and reminisce... go over past times... ‘do you remember when?’, they say... people round here really talk and they really listen. You needed your friends down the pit, for your own safety. And the women needed a support network to share the pressure of husbands’ dangerous lives and to pick up the pieces when things went wrong. Swadlincote is such a sociable place... always has been.’ [Local resident]

‘When the mines were here the landlords provided everything... galas, the miners’ welfare etc etc... people didn’t have to organise things for themselves... the mines used to provide a real community...’ [Local government employee]

Our point here is not that social capital is being created from nothing but that it is being reconfigured in interesting new ways. Old networks and associations are being transformed or replaced by new forms of connectedness emerging in response to different opportunities and constraints presented by the growing and

expanding Forest. This reconfiguration of social capital represents one of the most significant elements of the Forest's development – the indications from the research are that not only trees, but also communities are growing in the National Forest.

Section 2 – The benefits of a 'connected' Forest:

The *Growing Places* findings point to the presence of new forms of connectedness, and the research also provided the opportunity to explore some of their associated benefits. The results suggest that social, economic and environmental benefits are derived from the new social networks that are developing hand-in-hand with the changing landscape of the Forest. Accordingly, we suggest that the Forest's role in the reconfiguration of social capital should be factored into assessments of the sustainability of the overall project. Furthermore, future research could inform the development of Sustainable Forest Management practices more widely by providing a detailed examination of the specific qualities of forests as potential catalysts for enhanced social capital.

Social benefits:

The new green spaces open to public access provided by the expanding Forest offer new opportunities for health-related activities. This is illustrated by the popularity of 'Walking the Way to Health' walks and other health schemes that make use of forested sites. However, while these sites may provide the initial 'hook' for potential participants, it is the bonds of friendship and companionship that develop during these excursions into the Forest that bring people back week after week (see the examples above).

A further example of the physical and mental health benefits of collective interactions with the Forest was provided by one respondent's account of an environmental scheme run by his company. The company in question is concerned about the environmental impacts of its business activities. Looking at factors such as the daily commute to work, business travel, energy use at the office, and waste, employees have been able to calculate their

annual carbon emissions. They devised a number of initiatives to reduce these emissions, including a green commuter competition, an office bike scheme, and tree planting to offset emissions. So it was that in March 2005 a group of employees attended a corporate tree-planting day organised by the NFC where they planted fifty trees. Perhaps the most tangible 'product' of the team's activities was a stand of fifty saplings in the Forest. During his account, however, the respondent talked about other less tangible, but nonetheless valuable 'products': in order to organise these initiatives, the team has formed an 'Environment Committee' that meets every month and assigns tasks to ensure that progress is made. Every employee in the company regularly expresses support for the initiatives put forward by the committee, and the vast majority are actively involved. There has been a marked change in employee outlooks and practices, most evident in changing views about the environment and travel, with a marked increase in the number of employees who regularly cycle to work. There is a better atmosphere in the work place and people are said to be happier and healthier. The winner of the 'Green Commuter' competition was reported to have been overwhelmed by the day that they spent planting trees:

'He was just so happy to be doing something that was completely different from what he would ordinarily be doing... sitting at his computer. He kept saying afterwards how amazing it was to be out and about and doing some good for the environment.'

Further social benefits are evident in positive changes in the relations between farmers and rural communities brought about by National Forest schemes and initiatives. For example, the provision of public access to planted sites under the NFC's Tender Scheme⁵ has brought some farmers and communities closer together.

All the farmers interviewed initially struggled with the idea of allowing people onto their land:

'People on the farm usually spells trouble... they don't stick to paths and they trample crops. My brother couldn't understand how I could put up with having all those people roaming all over the place...' [Tender Scheme winner]

The interviews showed, however, that the decision to put a bid into the Tender Scheme, not only required a thorough re-thinking of a farmer's attitudes to public access, but often meant the incorporation of access as a central element of a new plan for a diversified farm aimed at bringing customers directly to the farmgate. In other words, the decision to 'go into forestry' often entails a switch from thinking about people as a nuisance to thinking about people as potentially valuable customers:

'People will come here, go for a nice walk in the forest, and then come and spend some money in the farm shop... We're going to farm people now!' [Tender Scheme winner]

Furthermore, it seems likely that this change in attitudes cuts both ways. The research findings suggest that the provision of access is leading to changes in peoples' attitudes towards farmers. The following excerpt from a conversation between a farmer and a walker indicates that, for many people, the transformation of an exclusive farming culture into a more inclusive one represents a very welcome change:

'Are you the farmer?'

'I used to be, but I got better!'

'Well, this place is a credit to you... thank you!'

Economic benefits:

The social networks growing up in the Forest are also contributing directly and indirectly to the economic development of the area. Respondents gave accounts of the various ways in which the Forest is channelling and structuring the collective activities of a wide range of individuals and organisations. This is particularly the case with the regeneration work of local authorities, regional development agencies and their sub-regional strategic partnerships, forming a 'growth coalition' (Logan & Molotch 1987).

'Working together is the new challenge. Jurisdictional boundaries are a bit irrelevant now The National Forest is here... East Staffs (District Council), South-

Derbyshire (District Council), and North-West Leicestershire (District Council)... we're all thinking of ways we can help each other out. That's a real opportunity for the National Forest.' [Local government employee]

Collaboration between local authorities is mirrored by an emerging cross-regional strategy for the tourism sector. For example, North-West Leicestershire Promotions, one of the Destination Management Organisations responsible for promoting tourism in Leicestershire, is currently encouraging the use of the Forest as a: 'distinctive visitor story and a cohesive strategy that will link all the tourism attractions and tourism providers in North-West Leicestershire and beyond.' Similarly, tourism providers themselves are not only using their location within The National Forest to attract consumers of their own products and services, but see the clear benefits of cross-selling to other providers in the area. In these ways, it seems that the Forest may be encouraging partnerships amongst service providers who once saw one another as competitors:

'We always leave leaflets and brochures for other attractions for the visitors to look at. And when we're full I always recommend other places in the area. That way they're more likely to come back to the area... I don't like just sending people away.' [Tourism provider]

The examples of cross-selling tourism providers, and local authorities working together are neat illustrations of a wide recognition that the Forest is a resource whose value can be maximised through collaboration. The NFC itself is a strong exponent of these forms of social capital and of the spirit of open, generalised reciprocity that often characterises these arrangements.⁶ For example, the NFC has created a 'Tender Scheme Winners' Club', whose members meet regularly to discuss problems and opportunities, and to offer advice to other farmers thinking about joining the scheme. Similarly, the NFC tourism officer regularly organises meetings for tourism providers where they have the chance to share experiences and tips, and also arranges 'fam visits'⁷ for providers to familiarise themselves with other attractions and

services available to visitors. In the words of one Bed and Breakfast provider:

'The 'fam visits' are great. I've got to know other people and seen what's on offer round here... now I feel part of The National Forest community.'

Accurate measurements of the economic benefits of enhanced social capital are difficult to make. However, that benefits do accrue to individuals, organisations, and institutions that are connected in the ways outlined above seems highly probable. Putnam (2000) even suggests that co-operation between economic actors might be a better engine for growth than free market competition – a hypothesis borne out by developments in the tourism industry in the Forest. In general terms, it seems likely that new forms of connectedness and emerging networks of mutual benefit represent significant features of the Forest's developing economy.

Environmental benefits:

Growing Places also discovered ways in which the Forest itself figures as an active element of the networks, associations and groupings that are emerging as the result of different projects and initiatives, with important implications for the improving environment of the area. These findings substantiate Gibson's pioneering work on perception within the field of ecological psychology.⁸ *Growing Places* points to some qualities of the Forest, or what Gibson would have referred to as the Forest's 'affordances', and to some of the effects these qualities might be having upon different groups and individuals. Of particular interest is the way in which group activities in particular places provide the setting for discussions about appropriate behaviour, or the moral conduct of people who live in, work in, or visit the area. These discussions are often contextualised by activities such as walking, volunteering and tree-planting, and tend to revolve around subjects such as access, vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour on Forest sites. The following points were made in these discussions:

'it's nice to see people walking footpaths properly because we (farmers) create the landscape... and it's nice to see people enjoying it...it's rewarding to see people appreciate what we've done... it's the people who don't respect the countryside that we don't want.' [Tender Scheme winner]

'Seeing these trees they've planted restores my faith in humanity... it's amazing that people can be so selfless as to plant a tree that is clearly for future generations.' [Walker]

'It's these bloody kids... they've got no respect... they've got this beautiful place to use and all they want to do is destroy it.' [Volunteer]

This suggests that specific forms of social interaction within places, and physical interaction with places, might be crystallising a sense of care for the environment that feeds into negotiations of a normative code that, in turn, governs the behaviour of forest users. It also suggests, crucially, that these communicative processes involve non-human as well as human participants – discussions may be taking their lead from changes to the physical environment. In this sense, the Forest is not only bringing about changes to the area's landscape but also to its 'valuescape'.

Certain qualities of the Forest are also playing a role in changing social arrangements on those farms which have won the NFC's Tender Scheme. Overall it seems that the transformation of conventional, production-oriented farmland into forest brings dramatic changes to a farmer's outlook, particularly with respect to the issues of access and farm ecology. One farmer's wife, for example, provided a telling description of the way her husband's core values have changed since trees were planted on the farm:

'He used to hate trees... he's a real conventional farmer at heart... you know, trees and hedgerows meant things that got in the way of machinery, something that got in the way of the combine... or a tree in the middle of a field was something that birds would roost in, dropping seeds and causing weeds. And he used to be a terrible one for

spraying... Chemical Ali we call him! Now the trees are here he loves them... I can see him getting really used to tinkering about amongst the trees, doing a bit of pruning and mowing... looking after them, really.'

Another farmer reflected on the way he has changed since the first successful application to the Tender Scheme:

'I still look over hedges at other farmer's crops, but just out of interest, you know... I was really proud of my fields, but I've no regrets... I just think of all that bloody work, and for nothing! There's still a lot of work... formative pruning, thinning. But we know where the money's coming from now... we can plan... and I love all the wildlife that's coming onto the farm... and it's great that other people can come and have a walk about...'

CONCLUSIONS:

Growing Places establishes some strong linkages between environmental and social change in The National Forest. The research shows that social interactions are the dominant feature of experiences of the National Forest, citing strong evidence of linkages between landscape change and a developing Forest sociality. Forested places are providing the setting for the reconfiguration of social capital and this 'connected' Forest is bringing a range of social, economic and environmental benefits.

We suggest that the Forest's role in the reconfiguration of social capital should be factored into assessments of the sustainability of the overall project, with future research providing a more detailed examination of what it is about changes to the area's physical environment that seem to produce enhanced social interaction and collaboration. Furthermore, the research suggests that the Forest itself is strongly implicated in the production of this social capital, implying much-needed revisions to current approaches to impact assessment which treat economic, environmental and social issues separately. Research that enables the development of revisionist evaluative frameworks that can accommodate the complex

interplay between the economic, environmental and social impacts of forest management strategies and policies should be a high priority.

Finally, the research has also shown that social values and normative codes are being renegotiated with the development of the Forest. Future research should provide a more thorough-going analysis of the links between different forest management approaches, developing environmental sensibilities and changing views about the appropriate conduct of people who live in, work in, or visit forests.

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Notes

- 1 Elsewhere it has been argued that places, because they are implicated within complex networks of exchange between groups, individuals and organisations, are not

necessarily fixed and static but have a capacity to move around in relationship to the centre and periphery of a given society (see especially Sheller & Urry 2006, Hetherington 1997).

- 2 Ethnography represents a specific branch of anthropology where qualitative research processes and products are aimed at 'thick' cultural interpretation. The ethnographer's aim is to go beyond reporting events and details of experience and to try to explain how these derive from and represent the webs of meaning in which people live. Ethnographic research usually involves long periods of time immersed within people's patterns of everyday life. 'Compressed ethnography', therefore, refers to shorter periods of time immersed within the day-to-day lives of sets of respondents.
- 3 Malinowski (1922) was an early advocate of balancing observations with direct participation as part of research methodology. He argued that: 'it is good for the ethnographer to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on' (1922; 21). For Malinowski, joining in helps the ethnographer in his efforts: 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world' (1922 25).
- 4 Social capital theorists, most notably Robert Putnam, use the concept of social capital to explore the idea that social networks have value, just as economic capital has value. Putnam defines social capital as: 'the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2000: 19). In his famous *Bowling Alone*, Putnam tracks the steady decline of 'connectedness' in the U.S. since the 1960s, and argues that many of the problems facing modern American society might be overcome if this negative trend could be reversed. To bolster his arguments, and to demonstrate the advantages of a connected society, he uses a wide range of statistical data from different states to demonstrate a positive correlation between high incidences of social capital and positive child development, safe, productive neighbourhoods, economic prosperity, good

mental and physical health, and strong democratic processes. A similar argument specifically related to the effects of social capital in providing protection for older people from dying of intense heat, is to be found in Klinenberg 2003.

- 5 The Scheme is a unique woodland incentive run by the NFC in partnership with the Forestry Commission (FC). The Scheme invites applications from landowners outlining a plan for woodland they want to create and manage and how much money they need to do it. Typically, the Scheme enables landowners to diversify their landholding and business interests, to create commercial and/or amenity woodland and can be linked with work that enhances or creates opportunities for recreation, access and tourism.
- 6 Putnam argues that social capital is produced within 'specific', or 'generalised' systems of reciprocity. Generalised reciprocity holds the greatest value: 'Sometimes... reciprocity is specific: I'll do this for you if you do that for me. Even more valuable, however, is a norm of generalised reciprocity: I'll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road' (Putnam 2000:20-21, emphasis in original).
- 7 'Familiarisation visits'.
- 8 For Gibson, perception is a mode of action involving the ceaseless performance of connections between a being and the world around it, and informing the fine-tuning of mental and physical responses to salient aspects of the environment, which he refers to as nature's 'affordances' (Gibson 1979: 127-143). The theme of nature's affordances has since been taken up by a number of commentators (Ingold 2000, Macnaghten & Urry 2001a, Morris 2004) all of whom ascribe a kind of 'agency' to the non-human in shaping human beings' mental representations of, and physical responses to, the world around them.