Title: Wildlife and Society, a case study of an Interdisciplinary Higher Education Conference

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Abstract:

This paper presents a case study of an interdisciplinary HE conference entitled Wildlife and Society: challenges for a shared future. The conference, held in March 2013, was planned to allow staff and students from a range of disciplines to meet and engage in discussion of wildlife and society interactions as a lens for a deep approach to teaching sustainability. It consisted of a series of presentations by speakers from the arts and media, literature and film, ecology and wildlife conservation, environmental education, primary education, anthropology, geography and religious studies followed by an extended plenary discussion on embedding biodiversity values into teaching practice. Feedback from participants and analysis based on sustainability pedagogies indicate that the conference was an effective tool for promoting education for sustainable futures (ESF) by fostering new connections and blurring disciplinary boundaries around one common theme, by promoting holistic thinking and consideration for the multifaceted nature of biodiversity issues. Although interdisciplinary research may be notoriously challenging, due to different disciplinary approaches and paradigms, it may also provide new opportunities and solutions when different disciplinary perspectives are directed towards a common goal. In this paper we will present qualitative data from discussions at the conference itself and also data from a subsequent survey of participants in order to explore (i) experiences and perspectives on interdisciplinarity in sustainability teaching and (ii) the potential impact of the conference itself on teaching practice.

Key words: interdisciplinarity; biodiversity; wildlife and society; ESF, ESD.