

Building new 'peer communities'? NGO networking and environmental science – Sally Eden (Geography), University of Hull (GB)

Despite extensive research into scientific and lay communities, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) are somewhat neglected as actors in science and technology, representing grey areas that do not fit neatly under either the label of 'science' nor the label of 'the public'. They have also been championed as well as pilloried for their influence on science and technology debates, being variously seen as unqualified critics, uncritical supporters and democratising activists opening up those debates to greater public scrutiny. This paper will address the spaces of NGO science in more detail, using examples from environmental policy debates, to address some of these supposed roles. I will particularly consider how NGOs have attempted to build and extend their own 'peer communities', using both classical and innovative scientific and technological practices, in order to support and further their own work. This raises practical issues about the influence of NGOs on environmental policy and management, but also theoretical issues about the definition of science, the relationships between the idealised realms of 'science' and 'lay' and whether hybrid spaces of knowledge can be established and legitimated in order to produce and apply socially and environmentally robust knowledge.