Discourse and narrative analysis:
Concepts and methodology

Hanne Svarstad
Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA)
hanne.svarstad@nina.no

EKOSIASA workshop, 23-25 May 2008, Bagamoyo

STUDY PRACTICES

Community conservation (CBFM and WMA)

Main research objective: Investigate impacts on poverty from community conservation.

Sub-objectives:
1. Analyse the link (What benefits and benefit-sharing?)
2. What participation, influence and power – for whom?

Poverty

Comparisons

STUDY IDEAS AND CLAIMS

Discourses, narratives, stories

Sub-objective iii. Employ narrative analysis at national and local levels to investigate the links between dominating ideas, policies and practices.

STUDY POLICY-ORIENTED ELEMENTS

i. Identify possible obstacles - against empowerment of marginalised groups
ii. Against pos. contributions to poverty alleviation
iii. Scenario building
iv. Outreach of research results

EKOSIASA’S sister project: PAPIA
Protected Areas and Poverty in Africa

Project aims

• To contribute to the understanding of the complex relationships between protected areas and poverty.
• Identification and examination of factors causing protected areas to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as of factors that might turn protected areas into ‘poverty traps’. 
EKOSIASA'S sister project: PAPIA
Protected Areas and Poverty in Africa

- 4 cases of national parks in Uganda and Tanzania.

PAPIA project components

- Discourse analysis on protected areas and poverty on global level;
- Narrative analyses for each of the four cases (national and local levels);
- Examination of economic and social effects in each of the cases;
- Towards the end of the project: Scenario building on possible developments in two of the cases.

What is "discourse"?
What is "discourse"?

3 different applications of the term

1) Linguistic approaches - discourse as text, discourse analysis as analysis of how sentences form text.

2) Everyday language - discourse as "conversation" or "discussion".

3) As applied here: Social science approaches in which discourses are seen as:
   - A shared meaning about a phenomenon
   - Shared by a small or large group of people
   - Main features:
     - Content (message)
     - Expressive means (e.g. narratives, metaphores)

Discourses simplify!

• For good

Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts. Each discourse rests on assumptions, judgements, and contentions that provide the basic terms for analysis, debates, arguments, and disagreements, in the environmental area no less than elsewhere. Indeed, if such shared terms did not exist, it would be hard to imagine problem-solving in this area at all … (Dryzek 1997:8).

• And for bad
Two leading discourses globally on area conservation (see Adams & Hulme, etc.)

The Fortress Conservation Discourse

• Wild species must be preserved by reserving areas - keep people away from living there and using the natural resources.
• Long history
  Forest reserves by the English colonial power
  National parks first in the USA
• Also called the “fences and fines approach”

Two leading discourses globally on area conservation (see Adams & Hulme, etc.)

The Fortress Conservation Discourse

• Needs and interests of local people ignored
• Local people seen as problems (threats and causes of problems regarding nature degradation, poachers, cause population growth)
• Protected areas established in Africa to satisfy:
  – European men’s perceptions of “the wild” and “wilderness”
  – Trofé hunting as demonstration of manhood
• Africa seen as the Garden of Eden, human species as its destroyer, preservation as the salvation

Two leading discourses globally on area conservation (see Adams & Hulme, etc.)

The community-based conservation discourse

• Taken over as hegemonic discourse (privileged solution)
• Common today among most conservationists
• Roots back to the 1950s
• Contents:
  – Conservation of species, ecosystems and biodiversity main objective.
  – Local people in and around protected areas should be allowed to participate in the management of the natural resources.
  – They should benefit economically related to the conservation.
The community-based conservation discourse

- Important actors in the production of this discourse:
  * Conservation biologists
  * Environmental NGOs
  * Development partners (donors)
  * Governmental and inter-governmental bodies
  * Sometimes: Speak with "two tongues"

Reasons for the success of the community-based conservation discourse:
1. It equates conservation with sustainable development - notifying human needs. As in the Brundtland Commission’s report and beyond.
2. Its emphasis on "community" been trendy since the late 1980s. A vague, idealistic, romantic and powerful concept. A neo-populist idea supporting the traditional against the modern.
3. In line with a shift in dominating discourse of development: Against "top down", "technocratic", "blueprint".

Reasons for the success of the community-based conservation discourse:
4. Renewed interest in the 1980s in the market and economic incentives for development
   - Conservation based on economic arguments
   - Less state, more local decision-making
5. Biological reason
   - Species cannot be sustained on small preservation "islands", therefore pivotal to make local people partners in conservation.
Two leading discourses globally on area conservation (see Adams & Hulme, etc.)

Reasons for the success of the community-based conservation discourse:
6. Rapid transfer and acceptance of the discourse especially in parts of the world in which exogenous ideas about “what to do” hold the greatest influence: Aid dependent countries.
   See points from Hoben 1995 (Adams & Hulme:19).
[7. Increased weight on “local” and “traditional” knowledge.]

Two leading discourses globally on area conservation (see Adams & Hulme, etc.)

According to Hutton et al. (2005):
The fortress conservation discourse is on its way back again!

National discourses on a topic can deviate from global discourses on the same.
"Discourse" must be situated in relation to other concepts such as:

- Individual opinions
- Culture
- Ideologi
- Paradigme
- Theory
- Narrative

What is "narrative"?

- In the literature: Much vague and interchangeable use of the terms "narrative" and "discourse". It is better to distinguish conceptually between them!

- Narrative: Accounts about concrete cases and framed within a specific discourse.


It is useful to distinguish "narrative" not only from "discourse", but also from "story" and "meta-narrative"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY</th>
<th>NARRATIVE</th>
<th>META-NARRATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both are terms for accounts of concrete cases.</td>
<td>Abstract structure.</td>
<td>Both illuminate the message of a discourse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The community-based conservation discourse

- There are quite a few examples of cases used as "success stories" (narratives)
- These are often made by involved parties in the projects – thus, no critical distance

In EKOSIQA we can critically examine claims from discourses and narratives in comparison to the project's own investigations of the practices.

Such claims may be about

- the bio-physical reality
- the social reality
- the structural reality
In EKOSIASA we can critically examine claims from discourses and narratives in comparison to the project’s own investigations of the practices.

– **Claims about the bio-physical reality:**
  Does the approach imply an adequate conservation of species, ecosystems and biodiversity? But this is not part of EKOSIASA.

– **Claims about the social reality:**
  Do local people benefit economically in a satisfactory manner?
  Are local people allowed to participate in the management of the natural resources in a manner that implies influence and power?

- **Claims about the structural reality:** What explanations are used to explain wanted and unwanted effects?

**4 types of discourses on environment and development:**

- **Preservationist discourses**
  - The fortress conservation discourse belongs here

- **Win-win discourses**
  - The community-based conservation discourse belongs here

- **Traditionalist discourses**

- **Promothean discourses**

Findings on discourses and their claims can be contextualised in the light of broader discourses on environment and development.
4 types of discourses on environment and development:

- Preservationist discourses
  - The fortress conservation discourse belongs here
- Win-win discourses
  - The community-based conservation discourse belongs here
- Traditionalist discourses
- Promothean discourses

Findings on discourses and their claims can be contextualised in the light of broader discourses on environment and development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conservation important?</th>
<th>Needs and interests of local people important?</th>
<th>Positive to partnership local/external actors?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preservationist discourse type</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-win discourse type</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes as means</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditionalist discourse type</td>
<td>Yes in terms of sust. use</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promothean discourse type</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main aspects of the four discourse types

Narrative analysis in EKOSIASA

- Narrative analyses for each of the four cases (national and local levels)
  - ‘Narrative’ applied as a concept of concrete accounts of a case framed within the broader framework of a discourse.
  - Study of narratives and stories that key actors produce about each of the four cases regarding poverty/poverty alleviation and participation.
3 main phases:
1. Preparations before field work
2. In the field
3. Analysis back home

1. Preparations before field work
   • Examine literature - academic and other - establish preliminary templates for comparison
     – Leading global discourses on natural resources, environment and local people
     – Discourses on the delimited topic (WMAs or PFMs)
   • Identification (preliminary) of types of actors with relation to the case
     – Types of external actors
     – Types of local actors
     – Selection (preliminary) of delimitations – area, types of actors
Methodology for narrative analysis in EKOSIASA

1. Preparations before field work
   • Examine literature - academic and other - establish preliminary templates for comparison.
   • Identification (preliminary) of types of actors with relation to the case.
   • Formulate (preliminary) research question(s)
     E.g.: What narratives and stories can be identified about [the case in question] among [specified actor groups]? Can narratives be found that are compatible to any leading discourses on natural resources on natural resources and local people on the global level?
     Questions can be formulated about comparisons of practices with narratives and discourses.
   • Get equipped with qualitative methodology.

Methodology for narrative analysis in EKOSIASA

2. In the field
   • Use qualitative strategies to get solid knowledge of narratives and stories the way they are produced without your own interference.

Methodology for narrative analysis in EKOSIASA

3. Analysis back home
   • Structure the data into a set of narratives and/or stories.
     - Relate to methods for coding and category building in qualitative data analysis.
   • Compare with leading discourses.
   • For some: Compare with EKOSIASA data about the practices.