

ABSTRACT

Authors: Roswitha Hofmann, Gabriele Mraz, Mathias Knigge, Gabriele Bernhofer

Title: The Chainsaw-Case: Gender-Specific Exclusions in Tool Design and Handling

The production of firewood is embedded in narratives of hard and dangerous work and masculinity, of technical tools like chainsaws and their use by "lumberjacks". Therefore, many women and some men and older people are often excluded from firewood production despite the fact that more and more people in Austria and Germany are producing their own firewood to become independent of fossil energy. In this paper we will present project results dealing with gendered and intersectional patterns of exclusion and inclusion in tool design (chainsaws, garden shredders and protective apparel), product communication and social dynamics related to private firewood production in those two countries.

The aim of the project was to investigate persistent elements and barriers of existing sociotechnical regimes concerning tool design, tool handling and agency in firewood production. In cooperation with a tool-producer and a forestry training centre a series of user-tests and a training course for women in firewood-production were designed. Data were collected using multiple methods (observation, videos and qualitative interviews) and analyzed employing a multi-level approach. The results of the project should promote changes in tool design towards universal design and contribute to diversity-sensitive product communication and the empowerment of women for firewood production. The project provides rich empirical data and analysis of the STS literature on how tool design is co-constructed by and embedded in narratives of hegemonic masculinity and facilitates/hinders inclusion in social and work arrangements.

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