

Incorporating social and cultural values in green infrastructure, planning and environmental policy

Summary

Our relationship with the environment is guided by social and cultural values. These values apply to all ecosystem services, but are especially applicable to cultural ecosystem services in which there are physical, social, sensory or emotional interactions with the environment. These values are inadequately taken into account in policy making, spatial and development planning.

This brief explains why information on social and cultural values is needed for green infrastructure provision and how the OPERAs project is preparing guidelines and templates for eliciting these values.

What is the policy issue?

Social and cultural values attach to all aspects of our lives including our relationship with the environment and ecosystem services. However, these values are regularly overlooked when it comes to policy and decision making in spatial planning and for

green infrastructure. This oversight applies at national level, for example in implementing policies, including environmental policies that involve costs or inconvenience for citizens. It also occurs at local and regional level where a diversity of often competing values may apply.

For example, local development planning or environmental impact assessment fails to take account of communities' social or cultural attachment to the environment. Expert input may be sought with regard to the natural environment or landscape. However, it is unusual for these assessments to take account of the public's relationship with these aspects unless there are evident economic, employment or health implications.

The strength of attachment that people have to the environment, for instance for reasons of emotional relationship, cultural heritage, way of life, community identity, sense of place, or spiritual value, is rarely investigated because this attachment is thought to be hard to capture and represent against other values. Failure to take account of these values can foster a sense of injustice or marginalisation, and lead to disengagement from the democratic process.

Required knowledge

European policy requires public participation in decision-making under the Aarhus Convention (2003/35/EC) and is supported under mechanisms such as Local Agenda 21). Social and cultural values are taken into account in certain legislative provisions (e.g. the European Landscape Convention).

However, there is little consistency in terms of application and constructive intent. In some Member States, citizen fora are regularly consulted on future policy and planning at local or regional level. In other Member States this interaction is restricted to consultation on existing plans. This level of consultation can provoke reactive comments, often combative, and often only allows for mitigation measures of a peripheral nature. Projects can be delayed by lack of recognition or understanding of the socio-cultural context

Consequently, there is a need for decision makers to be informed of the social and cultural values that people attach to the environment. This applies especially to

- policies or planning of a long term or strategic nature, e.g. Strategic Environmental Assessment (2001/42/EC),
- 'cultural ecosystem services' (CES) such as the contribution of green infrastructure to recreation, community interaction, physical and psychological well-being, and quality of life.

An understanding of these values is a fundamental component of the **Ecosystem Approach** to managing our environment. It can be built up through regular surveys of the public or via on-going community engagement using public meetings or workshops. These methods should be used to provide information on fundamental values with regard to the environment, to sound out local awareness, and as a means for policy makers

to inform the public on the rationale for particular plans or policies.

Key messages

1. An awareness of social and cultural values is essential to understanding people's relationship with ecosystem services and is a fundamental component of the Ecosystem Approach.
2. This awareness needs to be built into spatial and development planning and will deliver greater public engagement.
3. Workshops with stakeholders and the public, along with baseline and follow-up surveys can be used to inform policy and foster continuing public engagement.

OPERAs activities

OPERAs has a specific work package on social and cultural values. Investigation of these values, and of CES, is also a major element of various exemplars in the project.

In Ireland, the role of fundamental social and cultural values is being examined through the use of public and stakeholder workshops as a means to inform strategic local spatial planning and green infrastructure in the Fingal coastal area north of Dublin.

In Scotland, the project is examining public values in response to the possibility of future coastal realignment in response to higher sea levels under climate change. Other studies have examined the influence of social and cultural values in response to new residential development in rural areas close to Edinburgh

and the consequences of alternative land management within a country park

In Portugal, the project is examining peoples' attachment to a traditional land use (cork production)

In Spain, the project has investigated people's acceptance of measures to balance fishing and tourism interests with the protection of seagrass meadows

In Bulgaria, the project has explored local people's acceptance of the protection and re-creation of wetlands along the river Danube.

WCMC has developed a new module for the TESSA toolkit to facilitate the assessment of CES and aid their integration into land-use management.



Figure 1 Local Stakeholders identifying places of value along the Inner Firth of Forth

Planned results

Lessons from the various applications in OPERAs will be used to produce principles of best practice for socio-cultural valuation and a template of the steps by which this can be undertaken in practice. The project aims to demonstrate:

1. How socio-cultural valuation can be informed by ecological information and land use modelling.
2. How this can be integrated with economic valuation and be implemented with respect to local and national institutions of governance.

Anticipated challenges

Social and cultural values vary both at local level and between Member States. The project aims to provide principles of best practice, but the diversity of values and contexts means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to social cultural valuation. Strategies will therefore need to be adapted to each application or community. It is also desirable that regular soundings of values are undertaken to map changes in values over time, for instance in response to changing land use, environmental information or environmental change, and to avoid expensive one-off initiatives or surveys.

Contact

Dr Craig Bullock
University College Dublin, Ireland
craig.bullock@ucd.ie