

Taking account of shared and cultural values of ecosystem services

People hold collective as well as individual values that relate to the landscapes in which they live. What does this mean for land managers, businesses and decision makers?



Living With Environmental Change
Policy and Practice Notes

Note No. 11
September 2014

The Living With Environmental Change Partnership brings together 22 public sector organisations that fund, carry out and use environmental research and observations. They include the UK research councils, government departments with environmental responsibilities, devolved administrations and government agencies. The private sector is represented by a Business Advisory Board.

The provision of drinking water, crop pollination, energy, climate stability, and mental and emotional wellbeing are all benefits that nature provides for human beings. They are important to us in both practical and emotional terms, and how different individuals and communities recognise and relate to them depends on personal, shared, and cultural values. These values are not always explicitly expressed through conventional surveys or reflected in economic valuation. They often become clear only after people have talked with others about what matters most to them. If natural assets are to be managed for the benefit and wellbeing of all, however, we need to understand the values that individuals and communities attach to them in different circumstances.

What are shared values?

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-On (NEAFO) has developed a framework that can help decision makers identify and think about the shared values that communities hold.

This includes seven different types of shared values, some of which will overlap:

- **Transcendental values** are the principles and overarching goals that guide us, going beyond (or transcending) specific situations. Examples include honesty, security, enjoying life, social status, and harmony with nature.
- **Cultural or societal values** are culturally shared principles, virtues and goals, as well as a shared sense of what is worthwhile and meaningful.
- **Communal values** are values held in common by members of a community (eg geographic, faith or belief-based or activity-based).
- **Group values** are the values expressed by a group of people through consensus or majority vote, or more informally.
- **Deliberated values** are the values that individuals or groups form or express as a result of deliberating with one another, typically involving discussion and learning from each others' perspectives.
- **Other-regarding values** express the sense of importance attached to the wellbeing or moral standing of others (human and potentially also non-human).
- **Value to society** is the benefit, worth or importance of something to society as a whole.

Why do shared values matter?

Shared values matter to everyone involved in making decisions and can help decision makers avoid unintended consequences:

- **Businesses** need to know what behaviours their customers want and expect from them. Brand and reputation can affect their customers' opinions and their willingness to continue to buy goods and services.
- **National government and its agencies** need to understand the social impacts of future policies and how policies are likely to be perceived by the public.
- **Local government** can benefit from looking beyond traditional consultation processes to understand the plurality of values that communities hold.
- **Research funders** need to ensure that their research priorities reflect social and cultural as well as economic and environmental priorities, and that commissioned research resonates and connects with the values that underpin decisions in policy and practice.
- **Land managers** can benefit from understanding the shared values that different groups of people hold for particular places. Otherwise these values may only become apparent once decisions have been taken and provoke conflict; such decisions may be challenged in court or planning permission may be delayed or withheld.
- **Non-governmental organisations and community and activist groups** often have close connections to local communities and understanding the shared values that matter to these communities can help such organisations manage their assets and communicate their key messages more effectively.

When is it important for decision makers to understand what shared values communities hold about landscapes?

There may be particular added value to taking a shared values approach when:

- Issues or ecosystem services under consideration are complex.
- There is a lot of uncertainty.
- Values are likely to be subtle and implicit.
- Evidence is contested.
- A large number of different stakeholders are involved who may not know of, or understand, other groups' perspectives.

What underlying principles need to be taken into account?

It is important to remember that:

- Shared values are those that people hold together as members of communities, from local to global scales, and can be different from individual values.
- It is not possible to boil down all types of values to a single value, be that economic or expressed in other ways. Different types and dimensions of value are "incommensurable" ie they are not directly comparable.
- The values that people express when asked as individuals in conventional consultations or valuation exercises are a subset of their values. They are unlikely to represent all of their deeply held values and beliefs, including those that they hold collectively with other people.
- Many values are implicit and require a process of deliberation and/or learning to be recognised and articulated.
- Values do not always remain fixed over time or as the group evolves.

What methods can be used to assess shared values?

A variety of methods may be used for different kinds of situation and at different stages of consultation to help stakeholders express their views and underlying values.

They fall into six main groups:

- Deliberative - eg in-depth discussion groups; citizens' juries.
- Analytical-deliberative - eg participatory modelling where stakeholders work with academics to develop models that take into account a range of variables involved in a proposal.
- Interpretive and potentially deliberative - eg participatory mapping using geographical information systems or techniques such as storytelling.
- Interpretive - eg analysis of media coverage; study of cultural history from documents.
- Psychometric deliberative - eg using a "values compass" that asks participants to rank their individual transcendental values (eg honesty, enjoying life, family security, social status, harmony with nature) and discuss the degree to which these values are important for one's community, culture or society.
- Psychometric - eg using questionnaires to assess wellbeing benefits of green or blue spaces.

How can the NEAFO shared values handbook help to guide this process?

A handbook developed by the NEAFO provides suggestions for decision makers on when and how shared values can be taken into account in their decision making by:

- Providing examples both of existing methods that are likely to be familiar to many decision makers (eg from the Green Book and Magenta Book produced by the Treasury to guide public sector bodies) and of new approaches.
- Showing ways in which multiple tools and methods can be used together in specific policy venues and contexts.
- Encouraging decision makers to integrate shared values into their decision making processes.
- Helping decision makers understand when a shared value approach is likely to be useful and who needs to be involved in carrying this out.

What are the implications for decision makers?

Taking account of shared and cultural values is important:

- If decision-makers take into consideration a greater diversity of values, decisions are likely to be more representative of the values of those that they affect, and may also be less contested.
- Focusing just on individual and economic values can limit the validity of valuation and consultation, especially if these views are dominated by the most articulate, affluent, or politically powerful voices.
- The process itself can sometimes help to identify new and hitherto unsuspected values and may also lead to new and unexpected solutions to problems.
- The process can help to identify groups whose values are not being considered, and identify ways of engaging them more effectively by focussing more effectively on the sorts of values that motivate those groups.

Different methods are suitable for eliciting different types of values:

- A comprehensive assessment requires a mixed-method approach that combines different approaches. For example, assessing shared values by combining desk-based studies of historical data with (social) media analysis and focus groups to assess likely public reaction to a controversial policy decision, or combining non-monetary valuation techniques (like multi-criteria analysis) with deliberative monetary valuation techniques in project appraisal.
- The NEAFO handbook can help decision makers to implement this approach through the direct application of some of these exercises or with the support of qualified, experienced practitioners.

Further information

This note was written by Jasper Kenter and Mark Reed based on research carried out as part of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on (Work Package 6). Thanks to Kathryn Monk, Principal Advisor for Science, Natural Resources Wales, for comments.

Useful resources:

Shared plural and cultural values of ecosystems:
A handbook for decision makers
www.lwec.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments_video/HandBook-revised7-final2.pdf
NEA website: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>

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