

Cultural Values of Trees, Woods and Forests

Executive Summary 2010

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Executive Summary

This study presents the results of a literature review and primary research into the importance of the cultural values of trees, woods and forests for sustainable forest management. Interviewees included forestry professionals from England, Scotland and Wales and members of 'Friends groups' at Chopwell Wood in County Durham and Thames Chase Community Forest in Essex. This summary provides the key conclusions and recommendations from the study; the full report is also available.

Forest managers have to take account of cultural values as one of the central themes of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), but until now little attention has been paid to understanding and taking account of these values in the United Kingdom. This review reports on an investigation in which the cultural values and benefits provided by trees woodlands and forests were considered.

Cultural values are taken into account in forest plans at many spatial scales and managerial levels, with attendant stages of consultation and community engagement. The report makes recommendations for improving the articulation of cultural values and taking them into account as part of the processes of planning and decision-making.

Cultural values influence the way that we react and behave in relation to woodland access and management. There is a two-way cultural relationship between stakeholders and trees, woods and forests (Fig. 1). Our cultural values drive the way in which we access woodlands physically and mentally, and through our access we change the nature of the woodland and our cultural relationship with it. The physical nature of woodlands is altered by our access, for instance through management choices of silvicultural systems, or by creating cultural features like artworks or archaeological remains, and in turn these physical features create new opportunities and change our cultural access.

The cultural relationship with woods may be so deep that it constitutes or strongly contributes to a sense of identity (e.g. "we are the people with special knowledge of the history of our local forest"). Cultural associations with woods may be valued in their own right – they themselves represent 'public goods' that publics enjoy as part of their quality of life. Cultural histories, stories and meanings make the forest interesting and attractive to visitors. Managers can enhance these meanings and even create new meanings in a way that increases the value of the forest for recreation (e.g. by holding cultural events, or installing artworks). Furthermore an increase in access brings with it other potential social benefits of woods (e.g. health and well-being; education and learning; opportunities for social networking).

The adoption of the UNCED (United Nations Conference on Economic Development) principles of Sustainable Development underlies the policy statements of most agencies engaged in environmental management, including the Forestry Commission in England,

Scotland and Wales. Cultural values are not merely an additional layer of issues to consider as a constraint to normal management, they are the vehicle through which the value to society of trees woods and forests is realised.

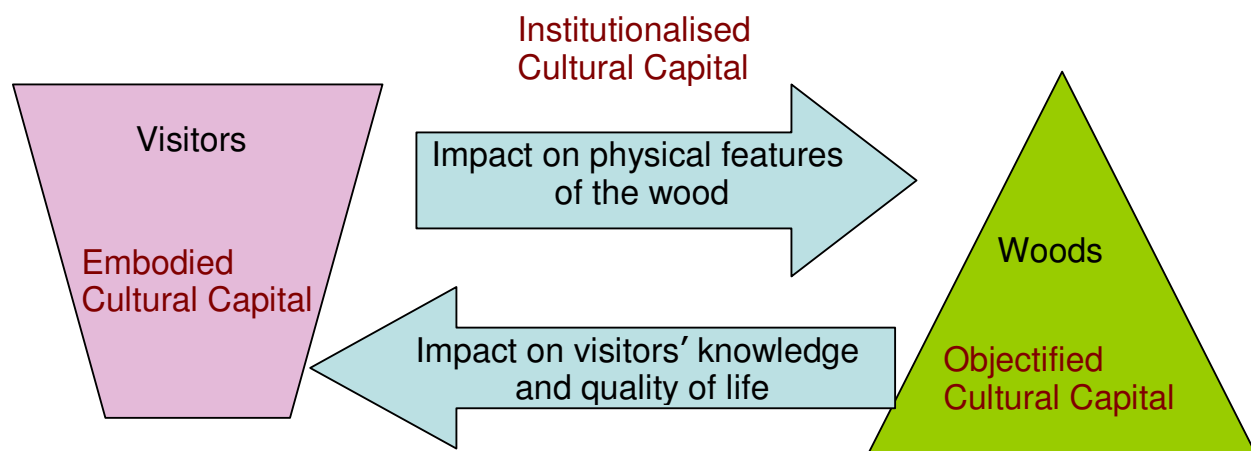
The study

The study dealt with three major questions:

1. What cultural values do stakeholders bring to woodlands?
2. What cultural features do woodlands bring to stakeholders and how can these be enhanced?
3. How are cultural values articulated and taken into account in forest planning?

The term 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) includes 'embodied' cultural capital – a property of stakeholders that includes their values and the stock of education and experience that they bring with them and which affects the way that they access the cultural value of woodlands. 'Objectified' cultural capital, or 'cultural assets' describes properties of the woodlands that affect their cultural value. For example symbolic associations based on cultural history are mainly stakeholder properties unless some physical sign of them is present in a particular wood. Examples are the 'Green Man' symbol, and political constructions based on past or present struggles. 'Institutionalised' cultural capital describes the institutional recognition of cultural value which can help people to gain cultural access to the woodlands through provision of interpretation, leaflets, books, staff guided activities and visitor centres, for example.

Figure 1. Cultural services and cultural capital



Current Forestry Policies and Strategies

Most Forestry Commission (FC) policy statements, from the United Kingdom Forestry Standard (UKFS) down to each country forestry strategy and to local plans, recognise the need to conserve cultural features and historic landscapes, although there is an

emphasis on archaeology and physical ruins, rather than on the cultural meanings experienced by locals and visitors. These statements display an increasing consciousness of 'cultural services', a term deriving from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA).

Cultural values in decision-making

The MEA sought to value cultural services in economic terms, with a view to achieving more equitable trade-offs with other categories of value. The European Landscape Convention (ELC) promotes a major shift from the conservation of individual sites to the conservation of the cultural value of all sites. This move away from 'privileged landscapes' is becoming increasingly influential in the approaches of English Heritage, Natural England and analogous bodies in Wales and Scotland to managing landscape and the historic environment.

Cultural values are taken into account in sustainability appraisals (e.g. the European Commission's Impact Assessment process), and also increasingly in monitoring systems such as the Montreal Process and the Pan European Indicators of the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

Planning systems used by agencies other than the FC that take account of cultural values include the National Trust's 'Statements of Significance', 'National Character Areas' (Natural England); 'Historic Landscape Analysis' and 'Historic Landscape Characterisation' (English Heritage). There is potential to extract principles and methods from these systems for use in forest planning.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are firstly to elaborate on the cultural services which have been identified, and to suggest a typology that might be used in considering and planning for them in forestry; secondly to consider how they might be taken into account in planning including consultation and community engagement, and thirdly to make suggestions for further research.

Cultural Services

Forests are particularly rich in this respect, and yet cultural services seem rarely to be taken into account in operational forest planning. Forestry professionals readily recognised that forests produce or harbour cultural goods, but it was not always easy for them to express this as the vocabulary is not completely familiar, and the subject is sometimes not considered to be part of current forestry mainstream.

The idea of 'cultural services' is incorporated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) (Anon., 2003) and includes the following elements:

Cultural Services

Nonmaterial benefits obtained from ecosystems

Spiritual and religious	Aesthetic
Recreation and ecotourism	Inspirational
Educational	Sense of place
Cultural heritage	

It may be helpful to distinguish between sources of cultural value, such as local knowledges, archaeological remains, or attractive diversity, and types of cultural benefit received like health or social contact. A typology for use in the UK context is suggested below:

Table 1. Typology of Cultural Values

Typology of cultural values		
Cultural resources:		
Intrinsic to visitors/users	Intrinsic to site	Benefits
Cultural capital* (embodied):	Cultural capital (objectified):	Health and well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social capital • Skills • Knowledge • Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archaeological remains • Historic features • Woodland diversity • Wildlife • Signs of management history • Stories • Practices • Artworks 	Social contacts Personal pride: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical achievements • Personal knowledge Education Inspiration Spiritual well-being Economic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism • Local economic activity

*Institutionalised cultural capital – interpretative boards, leaflets, books, visitor centres, staff and so on – make cultural services accessible to people.

Planning for Cultural Services

It would be too simple to suggest that Community Forests, and peri-urban forests plan for cultural services in a way that the more production orientated forests do not, but the contrast is stark. A major difference identified in this research concerns the identity of stakeholders. In the peri-urban situation, large numbers of people have an interest in small areas of woodland. These large numbers are, however, only a small percentage of the total population within the 'catchment' of the wood. Catchments are defined on the basis of the population distribution, the location of alternative woodland resources and the nature of the transport infrastructure. The interest of these stakeholders is in various types of recreational and cultural use. By contrast, in the more remote forested areas, relatively few local people, who represent a large proportion of the local population, have

an interest in the wood, and this interest is more likely to concern their livelihoods, and hence to be related to industrial forestry. They may be joined (especially in the larger Forest areas like Kielder) by large seasonal influxes of day visitors and tourists, with an interest in sporting activities like large scale organised mountain biking or orienteering.

Decision-making processes such as the Forest Design Plan (FDP) process entail a mixture of formal consultation and dialogue with competent authorities, and more informal engagement with publics and interested parties. A similar process will be part of large scale decisions such as those demanding Environmental Impact Assessment, or Public Enquiries. Service provision involves the everyday activities undertaken by FC community, recreation and education rangers as they lead walks, run events, and education visits in which they engage with local communities and as they encourage new groups to participate in forest activities. Through this process an understanding is gained of how people engage with and enjoy woodlands that can be utilised to change or improve delivery.

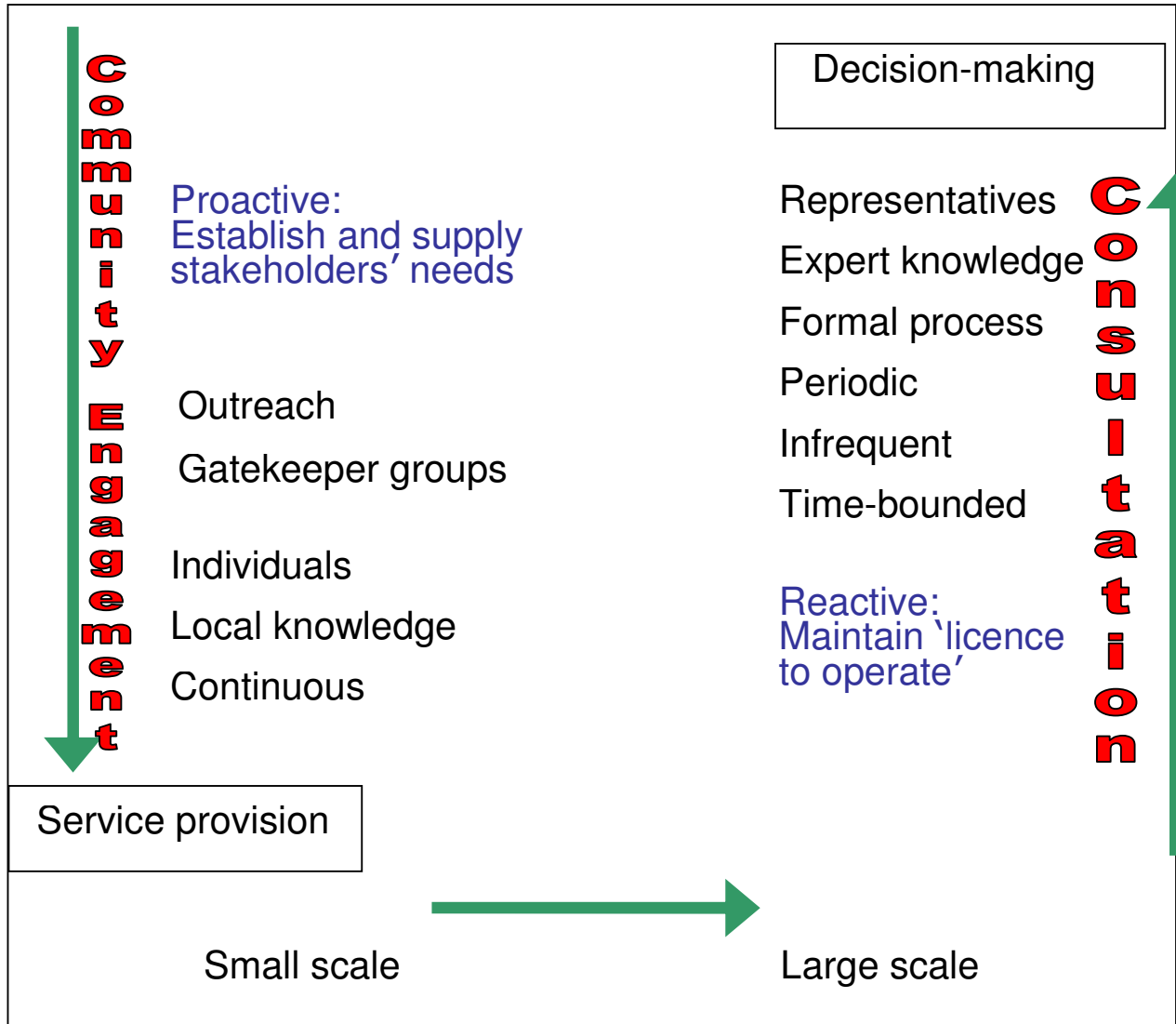
These ideas are summarised schematically in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2. Forestry Commission Consultation and Community Engagement

Consultation and Community Engagement Activities	
<i>Stakeholder Analysis is a prerequisite for all these activities</i>	
Decision Making	Service Provision
Consulting competent authorities e.g. conservation; heritage agencies; local authorities	Community engagement to determine local needs (e.g. for access, volunteering, health referrals)
Engaging in dialogue with publics and interested parties.	Discussing local issues (e.g. excessive erosion caused by concentrated access, needs for improved infrastructure....)
Periodic e.g. revised every 10 years	Continuous – community engagement about issues as they arise
Enrolling local knowledge; local expertise is needed for effective decision-making	Outreach activities e.g. with local communities or schools
Using techniques ((Hislop, Twery et al., 2004) for participatory decision-making	Use of informal techniques to engage stakeholders
Large-scale big decisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Impact Assessment • Impact Assessment 	Large-scale: Dealing with the needs of National organisations e.g. Ramblers, Mountain bikers, Car Rallies.....

A difference in stakeholder identity results in a contrast in terms of the levels of consultation and community engagement which may be appropriate; in particular, it suggests that 'service provision' is a very different subject for consultation and community engagement compared with 'decision-making' (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Schema showing the distinction between decision-making and service provision



The arrows in the figure indicate direction – there are no sharp distinctions between these processes. For instance, large scale negotiations about car rallies may take place with representative at national level, but they still concern service provision rather than decision making.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings there are potential opportunities to incorporate/take account of cultural values in a more targeted/nuanced way:

1. FC policy should consider ecosystem services, and who has access to them – how are the cultural benefits deriving from the ecosystem services provided by trees, woods and forests distributed amongst different socio-economic groups?
2. Cultural services (see Table 1) are central to the delivery of SFM. Planning for cultural services should be proactive as well as reactive; the FC not only has to sustain its 'licence to operate' it is also concerned with the delivery of cultural services as part of its core business. This is implicit in the Forestry Commission's policy documents, and it needs to be rolled out with staff through normal communication and training at all levels.
3. In its community engagement, the FC should focus more on obtaining an understanding of the culture of its stakeholders, rather than trying to educate them to any particular point of view.
4. It may be helpful for the FC to distinguish between decision-making processes such as the FDP and impact assessments on the one hand, and the processes concerned with service-provision on the other when considering consultation and community engagement methods (see Table 2).
5. The concept of cultural capital (Table 1) provides a helpful way of planning for cultural services. For instance, identifying conserving and enhancing objectified and institutionalised cultural capital is a means to plan for the delivery of cultural services. Cultural access may be enhanced by adding to institutionalised cultural capital e.g. by providing improved literature and guidance or through community outreach programmes.
6. The cultural assets (objectified cultural capital) of a wood can be enhanced in a variety of ways, for instance through the installation of artworks, or by collecting oral histories.
7. Stakeholder analysis should be a pre-requisite for consultation and community engagement. Identification of who the stakeholders are and what type of stake they have in particular processes is a defence against the bias that can potentially occur when highly articulate or opinionated actors make their voices heard at the expense of others.
8. Where possible, 'gatekeeper groups' should be identified and encouraged as an efficient route for dialogue with particular communities.
9. Systems for analysing cultural services in use by other agencies might offer methods that could be adapted for use by the FC. Examples include 'Statements of Significance', 'Landscape Character Assessment' and its derivatives.

Future Research

Research is needed in relation to the three major issues raised by this study: 1. the cultural status of stakeholders 2. cultural assets of trees, woods and forests 3. how cultural values are taken into account in forest planning. Consultation and public engagement are the means by which managers gather information about cultural values and negotiate how these might be managed. Further research is needed to explore ways in which consultation and public engagement might be improved.

Stakeholders

1. Research is needed to find relevant measures of cultural capital in relation to users of woods, so as to develop an understanding of the ways in which cultural values can be enhanced and developed for the benefit of multiple publics. This is an aspect of the (more general) need to understand the spatial distribution and characteristics of visitors, so that managers can better plan for access provision. For instance the distribution of members of wildlife trusts might indicate which woodlands merit most investment in nature trails.

Cultural Assets

2. A variety of methods is needed to identify and record cultural assets as part of SFM. Annotated lists might be sufficient for scheduled ancient monuments and other visible cultural remains, but other cultural meanings may only be understood through dialogue with those that hold them, and in the full knowledge that such values are constantly being re-negotiated. Improved methods are needed to identify, and take account of these meanings.

Forest Planning

3. Research is needed to investigate the potential use of planning tools such as 'statements of significance' or 'landscape character assessment', so as to guide forest planning in relation to the maintenance and enhancement of cultural services, the quality of life of local residents and visitors and the encouragement of tourism. This needs to be done in communication or partnership with other competent agencies.
4. The development of skills and methods for public engagement is still at an early stage in the FC. Research is required to identify new methods, clearly distinguishing between the need of *decision-making* on one hand and *service-provision* on the other. Although there are obvious overlaps, the nature of the dialogue clearly differs between these functions, and means need to be identified to ensure that managers have the skills and tools to operate effectively in both these areas.
5. In the field of decision-making, the use of participatory tools that can be used to help stakeholders to make trade-offs between cultural and other criteria should be

researched, including multi-criteria analysis tools. The aim here is to combine reductionistic and quantitative methods with holistic and qualitative methods.

6. In the field of service provision, good practice in community engagement, including the identification of appropriate 'gatekeeper groups', needs to be established so that it can be more generally applied.

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