

Place-making and Communities: A review of concepts, indicators, policy and practice

Concepts used in relation to the social benefits that green space can potentially provide include *community empowerment, community capacity, community resilience, community cohesion, social capital, and place, place-making and place-shaping*. However, often there is a lack of clarity around what these concepts mean, what they look like in practice, or how they can be measured. This summary reports on a review undertaken to explore the usage and definitions of these terms within a GB context, their operationalisation within public forestry and current indicators used for their measurement.



'Good place-making can provide communities with an important cultural context; a sense of pride and belonging; and a sense of local and national identity. It can provide environments which function well; link well with surrounding settlements and provide attractive areas in which to socialise, to move around and to do business' (Scottish Government, 2009).

Background

Concepts such as community empowerment and place-making have been increasingly included in a wide-range of government policy documents in Great Britain over the last few years. These concepts are believed to be areas in which forestry could significantly contribute. This review was initiated because the Forestry Commission identified a need to gain a more thorough understanding of community and place-making concepts to enable the organisation to better meet policy requirements.

Objectives

This research aimed to:

- Define key concepts relating to the potential community and place-making benefits that could be realised through trees and woodlands in England, Scotland and Wales.
- Explore the usage of these concepts in government policy, including forest policy.
- Identify current indicators used within GB for their measurement, and gaps in indicators currently used in a forestry context in England, Scotland and Wales.

Methods

- This was a desk-based study concentrating on government policy documents, supplemented by academic resources and grey literature.

Findings

While most of the concepts discussed in the review have been adopted by the three national governments of Great Britain in various policy areas (including forestry), the prominence given to them differs and they are not always used to mean the same thing, especially with regards to the concept of 'place'. A full understanding and integration of the concept of place has not occurred within UK public sector forestry and while the concepts of community cohesion and social capital have received some attention in forestry policy, this has been limited. There are also clear gaps in terms of indicators and measurement frameworks for the concepts discussed, although the level of this problem varies between the concepts, between the three countries, and between forestry and other policy areas. For those forestry programmes with a community and/or place-making agenda, the monitoring and evaluation has thus far been very poor, with a lack of baseline data being collected.

Recommendations

The review highlighted a number of recommendations:

- The use of narrow, or restricted indicators, and lack of use of appropriate indicators within forestry for most of the concepts discussed is a potential concern. It is suggested that more work is needed to assess the applicability of a range of indicators in the forestry context.
- Forestry indicators for the physical and spatial elements of place exist and could usefully be supplemented by other indicators which are currently used to measure community empowerment. More attention should be given to measuring people's perceptions of the places they live in, and how this is enhanced or not by local woodlands and their relationships with woodland.
- There is also a need for the development and more systematic use of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- It would be beneficial to know much more about what the concepts discussed look like in practice, how they can be operationalised and what the most appropriate forms of woodland-based intervention are to achieve this.
- Further research into how place and place-making methodologies and place attachment, dependence and identity measures can be integrated into forest management policy, planning and implementation could prove fruitful.

Partners

Forest Research and the Forestry Commission

For further information contact: amy.stewart@forestry.qsi.gov.uk

Funding/Support

This research was paid for by the Forestry Commission

Reports and Publications

Stewart, A. *Place-making and Communities: A review of concepts, indicators, policy and practice*. Forest Research, Edinburgh.