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PRESENTATION TEXT: Developing Shared Socio-Cultural Values in Green Infrastructure Planning

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Introduction

Changing brownfield landscapes through green infrastructure planning and design requires a deep understanding of the implications of such change both physically for the land, for the values that exist and are embedded in such landscapes, and in terms of the opportunities for changing values. In order to understand the potential benefits, opportunities and problems that such change might involve we need to consider how human interactions with natural processes create values, the nature of those values and how landscape change affects values. Values are difficult to identify and to understand, particularly shared rather than individual values. In thinking about shared values we therefore need to use methodologies for working with communities and landscapes that reveal such values, and then ensure that the planned change also incorporates the ability to respond to changing values. In this presentation I am therefore going to concentrate on thinking about this idea of shared values in relation to landscape change, particularly in relation to green infrastructure planning and brownfield sites.

What we mean by ‘Landscape’.

Definitions are different in different cultures. In the UK landscape is seen as multi-dimensional. The understanding of landscape as both territory and place is long-held in the academic literature. In Europe our definition of landscape is very much about the interaction of people and natural processes that create what we understand by the term ‘landscape’. Change is an inherent characteristic of the landscape, and understanding past landscape development and cultural values is important for the management and regeneration of today’s landscape. Landscape is undoubtedly something we perceive and experience but we can also consider as Turkenli suggests that “We are the landscape” because all life springs from it. So it is therefore the basis for identity and culture: we are a product and a producer of landscape. Our landscapes today represent our culture. So brownfield land has been created by the values embedded within our culture. We can also see landscape as a common ‘good’ that needs to be sustained if we are to survive in the way that we wish, or perhaps in any way at all.

The idea of landscape as a process is I think particularly helpful in considering cultures and traditions and what we value in landscape. Cultural values are increasingly in focus by policy-makers, but there are difficulties in how to identify socio-cultural values and then to translate these into relevant policy. Landscape is a valuable resource, and this is why we need to think carefully about brownfield
lands that are usually perceived as degraded or having no value at all. We need to build a better understanding by the various disciplines involved in landscape policy and practice and by policymakers.

**What are ‘values’?**

The concept of ‘value’ ...is now generally considered to be a social construction arising from the cultural contexts of a time and place” (Stephenson, 2008: 129). People hold ‘values’ and also express ‘value’ for things therefore it is important to understand how values are developed and how things are valued. Cultural or social values are generally understood to be those values that are “shared by a group or community, or are given legitimacy through a socially accepted way of assigning value” (Stephenson, 2008: 129)

There are multiple ways of valuing landscapes: the concept of value (or values) is mixed up with ethics and principles. This makes it a slippery concept and one where cultural and social understandings have to be examined. It is also important to note that the way different disciplines describe and understand values are VERY different.

In an examination of landscape architects a multitude of divergent values were identified (Thompson, 2000). In addition it was found that:

- Values may overlap
- Values are often rivalrous and conflictual
- Values are complex
- Values they often cannot be compared
- Values may be positive or negative (This diagram of illustrates positive values)

The normative position is to try to maximize positive values and therefore in landscape planning, to maximise value in all three areas. It seems that in successful projects - it may be desirable to try to identify where the overlapping areas are as these may be the most desirable, thus such concepts may help to develop a framework to assess the likely success of a project or policy.

In green infrastructure planning on brownfield land it is important to think about these three areas of values; to identify where there are existing values that need to be considered, where there are negative values and how green infrastructure planning can protect, enhance or create values. The key principles of green infrastructure planning can help here: these are multifunctionality, multidisciplinarity, participatory working and an inclusionary approach. This kind of work means compromises; not all goals can be achieved and such compromise has both structural and functional implications. In considering brownfield land we can think about the present and past but also, most importantly what we would like the future landscape to be.

External influences or drivers for change may be powerful – these may be physical like turbulent weather, or political. Both may remove evidence of past activities in the landscape and like the Tsunami that which crashed into thousands of miles of coastline on March 11th 2011 here in Japan, both can cause damage, destruction and long-lasting trauma to humans and landscapes. Often we do not recognise aspects of landscape as valuable until they are gone or have changed. Trying to
forget or removing the vestiges of the many links to the past and skills and memories contained in even derelict and brownfield landscapes may not be a way to build sustainable futures.

The question of what should be conserved as well as how we develop new ways of life that will produce meaningful landscapes therefore becomes more critical. It is also important for policymakers and managers to question how perceptions of landscapes may be changing and the role of changing values in the creation and maintenance of landscapes. If we consider how landscape values are created we can think about how we interact with landscapes.

In many western cultures until recently our day-to-day life was lived at a relatively small scale in the landscape. This changed with increased communications, the exchange of goods and services and of course globalisation. Sense of place in such communities was established partly as a response to seasons and the affordances of the landscape, but also in response to the character of the spaces that developed, the activities carried out and the customs that grew up around the activities. The environment was moulded by the use and the modification of natural processes that such activities entailed: as Nassauer (1995) observed, ‘culture changes landscapes and culture is embodied by landscapes’ (p229). I have described this interactive nature of humans and landscape as ‘mutual moulding’ or a continuous circle of interaction and creation. This is a very different idea from a traditional western idea that humans have control over natural processes and predominantly imprint value onto it. It requires recognition that we need to work with both natural processes and communities that live in the landscape to understand values. We cannot however always see all the values embedded in the landscape. The invisible cultural landscape may not be recognised as ‘landscape’ or ‘cultural’ because our present ways of seeing may be limited—this includes areas such as degraded or brownfield sites.

Those inhabiting the landscape may value the landscape in particular ways and have their own ways of expressing these values which professionals do not recognise. An example might be children, whose values may be very different from adults and who may express it through the way they act in the landscape or the way such landscapes provide them opportunities to express themselves such as shown here in extreme cycling, in spending time in special places in the landscape such or in self-expression such as during play or dance.

Janet Stephenson’s Cultural Values model is helpful here in trying to illustrate how the process by which values become embedded over time but may not be seen or perceived; and the importance of practices, relationships and forms of landscape. What we immediately perceive in landscapes relate to surface values. In brownfield land we often see very little and what we do see we perceive as negative. Our landscape perception is determined by our experience of the landscape; primarily gained through the senses, but also through learning via stories and traditions passed on over generations. We find from perception studies that the form and elements of the landscape are important, but also communication of the meanings and associations. Sense of place may be perceived through one experience of a landscape or built up over time through a number of experiences.

Responses to landscapes are as complex as the values that are associated with them. In creating new green infrastructures it is helpful to represent past and present Landscape Character to understand processes and values in the landscape, even with brownfield sites; memories, activities that celebrate past events (as shown here at the Durham Miners’ Gala), films, pictures, songs, old maps
which show the pattern, structure and special places such as this memorial grove are helpful. Such understandings can provide the basis for developing new structures and patterns in green infrastructure planning.

Landscape values are often portrayed in fairly simple terms – in the UK in the past it has been very much as a scene, but not something that has multiple values as can be revealed by landscape character analysis that carries out deep mapping of past events and processes. Assessments of all kinds of landscapes are often carried out by experts in different disciplines looking at their own areas, using their own frames of reference and interests to determine what is perceived to be ‘of value’. Expert assessments can miss the value that can only be gained as a result of the ‘lived experience’ of landscapes, in particular intangible values – They also do not consider the difference between individual expert values and shared values in communities. Such shared values are developed through shared experiences and deep knowledge of place, in day-to-day contact with landscapes over time and in sharing views and interactions with local landscapes. Capturing these understandings in policy and landscape practice is difficult.

There is a growing realisation in the UK that protected landscapes such as National Parks provide all kinds of services; embedded within them are many different kinds of shared values that are expressed in policy through their protected status. There are other examples of ways in which different kinds of values are translated into policies and practice, such as within the community forests which we will be hearing about later today.

In the political world the emphasis is often on monetary values and these are often seen as shared values. Some values may be translatable into financial terms, some may not. Money can be used as a proxy, but it is not always desirable to do so. Clearly brownfield sites in cities like the riverside in Newcastle (on the left) will have an important economic value, but we need to consider who holds such values: are they values of developers, of politicians or the community? The right shows use of a brownfield site on the riverside that has self-regenerated grass, forming a wonderful natural play area for children. What are the values here? Is it about money? Not everything can or should be evaluated in financial terms.

**What are shared socio-cultural values?**

The academic literature suggests that people are not born with values, although people are born into cultural value systems. Universal socio-cultural values are variously categorised (including objective and subjective, legal, political, religious, aesthetic, moral, ethical, artistic, existential, spiritual, cultural, cognitive, humanistic, homeland, motherland and human) with the suggestion that, while over time values may vary, the fundamental nature of the values remains. Studies in traditional cultures have identified seven traditional (or cultural) values (kindness, honesty, sharing, strength, bravery, wisdom and humility). Newhouse suggests that these values should be interpreted and translated into community processes, institutions and codes of behaviour which means that ‘the needs of the group take precedence over the needs of the individual’ (Newhouse, 2000:58). It is generally understood that interaction between people helps shared values to emerge.

Shared values (or societal values) are understood as the values people collectively hold as ‘social beings’, not simply in terms of individual costs and benefits – or preferences and motivations - but in
terms of ‘social rights and wrongs’ (Fish et al., 2011:1184). Shared values therefore are fundamentally different to the concept of plural, individual or aggregate values.

In order for shared values to be used in environmental planning, they need to be identified and therefore need to be expressed in some way. These former industrial sites are both cited under UNESCO World Heritage valuation which identify landscapes of shared cultural value. Fish et al. (2011) identify the importance of the recognition of shared values by those involved in assessment and decision-making; particularly where trade-offs have to be made. Participatory processes are identified as being important in the development and expression of shared values. Researchers have suggested that using human well-being and quality of life as concepts that express shared socio-cultural values is useful (Fish et al., 2011).

In a research project examining the modelling of values, I worked on identifying categories of values that could be used within a decision-support system for policy-making in environmental planning. This illustrates some of the components of the Social Wellbeing model and the nature of the values that were used in an early discussion phase of the project. In our project we tried to capture both individual and shared relevant values by looking at values identified in the Ecosystem services literature as well as looking at existing methods such as landscape character analysis. This model allowed for relationships between values to be expressed and explored. The key point was the need to identify and debate what values exist in a particular landscape. The importance of involving the community and stakeholders in this debate also emerged.

Green infrastructure planning requires the consideration of values thorough thinking about the functions or ecosystem services that GI can perform: GI can be used to help respond to issues such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, to helping address health problems through green exercise, through improving air quality and therefore reducing problems related to breathing, through therapeutic benefits to our mental health, and by doing so reduce the amount we spend on medical services. As societies in both the UK and Japan have increasing ageing populations, this is particularly important: to keep healthy and happy (so we need to consider both the physical and the mental health that close association with landscape can provide). In the UK and in a number of other countries the focus of GI development is very much on urban areas – which is where most people live. The perceived housing crisis in the UK has encouraged a focus on the potential of brownfield sites in and around cities.

In the North East of England we have a lot of experience of brownfield sites, particularly as a result of the demise of industries such as the coal and shipbuilding. So we now have experience of using brownfield sites in and around cities for regeneration and of using landscape solutions as well as rebuilding on such land. In the past, governments thought that these sites had no values for local people. Sites were often cleaned, capped to reduce pollution seepage, and any vestige of former industrial use was removed and a completely new use given. Our approach now has changed. Now we realise that even the most derelict or polluted land may have values for local people embedded within it. The important point is therefore to reveal those values and to work with communities to discover the character, significance of these values.

We now work with communities in very different ways to reveal existing shared values and to understand the kinds of symbols and elements as well as the experiences of landscape that form new community values. An example of this is on the Durham coast shown on the left here, and in a
variety of other contexts across the country. There are also good examples of where new culturally valued landscapes have been created. Sometimes as a kind of new layer in an existing landscape. An example of this can be seen here at Hansa Coking Plant in Dortmund, Germany which has become internationally renowned for managed natural re-colonisation of industrial structures. New layers provided by landscape reclamation are important. Damaged landscapes present a real opportunity for community involvement and have or are becoming new cultural landscapes in a number of ways. Other examples can be found in Asia. Many landscapes in China are good examples of fast change in landscapes. The designed landscapes of China are expressing new cultures and providing high quality new landscapes that reflect today’s concerns – such as sustainability. Such new landscapes challenge the idea that fast change cannot produce valuable cultural landscapes.

There are however, considerable difficulties with trying to understand shared cultural values in fast change landscapes and many fast changing landscapes in China are created as expert-led solutions rather than community collaborations. Planning for the opportunities that bring communities and individuals into some kind of engagement with landscape, in under-valued existing landscapes and in the planning of new landscapes, may be an important way of providing opportunities for interactions to occur that lead to the perceptions of value recognised in cultural landscapes.

Sometimes there are really high gains to be achieved in high profile and innovative projects such as the Hi-line above ground park in New York. This was based on a derelict railway line. It now provides a new green route through an area of the city that was degraded, much of it was derelict and unvisited. This has changed radically with large numbers of both locals and tourists using the Hi-line route every day. We have similar green infrastructure using former railway lines as cyclepaths and footpaths in the UK. These routes create a new functionality, but also revive feelings of pride, reveal associations and meanings that have been hidden by the dereliction.

In large scale damaged landscapes such as the former coalfield landscapes around Newcastle, large scale benefits can sometimes be seen, not only from the physical change, but also in the building of community-based partnerships. Outside Newcastle we see Northumberlandia or ‘the lady of the North’ which is a massive earth model designed by Charles Jenks and created from coalfield spoil heaps. It is a popular public green spaces now valued as a symbol of restoration and regeneration on the city fringes.

If we understand the creation of landscape is process – and one that is often a long process, then we can understand that the development of shared values might also take a long time, might be complex and we need to consider whose values need to be understood. In examining the creation of green infrastructure on brownfield sites the key to me seems to be how people interact with the landscape in understanding how existing values can be revealed and new values constructed. So we can consider not only working with different disciplines, but also different kinds of stakeholders – or those who have a stake or interest in – landscape. These may be wide ranging communities of interest, place or profession. Different cultures make sense of the landscape in a variety of ways and have different shared values. Unlocking landscape knowledge is important in ensuring that we manage landscape change in a way that does not destroy existing meanings embodied in the landscape and that in the creation and reconstruction of landscapes we provide the opportunities for positive interactions that can build new landscape meanings for future communities. Interactions between people and landscapes can be revealed and encouraged through participatory action.
Sense of place may be recaptured. Visioning processes for future landscapes using green infrastructure planning can help bring an understanding that landscapes are not static, but as dynamic as societies and cultures.

The concept of co-production assumes collaborative action. Co-production has also been used to describe all kinds of collaborations with and without the general public. In policy and practice there is a growing interest in public participation or co-productive working in a number of areas, particularly in ‘citizen science’, and environmental planning where participation equates to a form of social learning or engagement that will help change attitudes and environmental behaviour (Toogood, 2013).

In my own research on the Hydrocitizenship project, I am working with a community using a range of methods illustrated here, involving artists in an extensive greenspace next to a major river in Yorkshire. Methods include:

1. Conversations while walking – or ‘walk & talk’ activities
2. Review and Sharing in meetings both inside and out in the landscape
3. Observation, Reflection & Dissemination using digital media
4. Performance and Creative Interventions in the landscape

The feeling generally is that there is a need to develop better methods to understand collective social values. So there are a number of areas to consider if we are to capture social values including:

- Identifying what constructs value? What is considered interesting, important and relevant?
- Considering that values are continually changing according to time and cultural context
- The need to capture a range of values, in different ways
- And to capture ‘life support services’ which are often unvalued
- To consider how we integrate scientifically verifiable data with more subjective judgements that reflect the values and beliefs of different stakeholders

As I suggested at the beginning: Changing brownfield landscapes through green infrastructure planning and design requires a deep understanding of the implications of such change both physically for the land, for the values that exist and are embedded in such landscapes, and in terms of the opportunities for changing values. In particular we need to consider all kinds of ways of identifying the values that are embedded by humans within the complex cultural and ecological systems that are the brownfield areas within our cities.

Capturing shared values through participatory and co-produced research can help reveal what is valued; although many people may hold a value, it is clear that judgement about what others value is difficult unless information is shared and we think of innovative ways to gather the relevant data to examine. In order to understand the potential benefits, opportunities and problems that changing brownfield areas might involve we need to work with communities and landscapes to reveal values, and then ensure that the planned change can respond to changing values over time. As Forman & Collinge (1997 p129) have said “The future does not just lie ahead: it is something that we create. More precisely, the future is produced by natural processes and human modifications thereof”.

Toogood, 2013.
USEFUL REFERENCES:


