

Special Session: Cultural ecosystem services: Frontiers in theory and practice

Abstract Title: How do natural environment agencies take account of CES: approaches and challenges?

Full abstract

Natural environment agencies such as Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and the Forestry Commission are engaging with the ecosystem approach (EsA) and the identification of ecosystem services and benefits; among them cultural ecosystem services (CES). This is occurring primarily through two different approaches: 1) incorporating and or translating cultural ecosystem services into existing management and planning processes and practices; 2) developing and trialling new methods based on an EsA.

The Forestry Commission and Natural England are primarily taking the approach outlined in point 1. In the case of the Forestry Commission in England (FCE) a national expertise team is working to develop a more resilient woodland resource by creating the conditions that enable landowners, managers, businesses, civil society organisations and local communities to protect improve and expand England's woodlands. The FCE national expertise team is organised into small groups each channelling expertise on one of the four ecosystem service categories. The small team focusing on cultural ecosystem services have expertise related to the use and enjoyment of woodlands, green infrastructure and cultural heritage and landscape. FCE has been involved in explicitly integrated land use management projects such as the Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) and the Grow with Wyre LPS which although they are not specifically taking an EsA do incorporate some of the concepts of an EsA with identification of ecosystem services and involvement of local people in decision making. An evaluation of the Neroche LPS (Carter et al. 2010) found that the creation and involvement of a local stakeholder group made up of members of local communities in the Blackdown Hills in south west England provided a successful approach to understanding CES. It also provided an opportunity for an informal, iterative and emergent process of decision making which allowed the LPS to develop flexibly and enable different groups to reach agreement on the core elements of the programme. An important legacy of the Neroche LPS has been the creation of the Blackdown Hills Trust and the development of a new social enterprise called the Neroche Woodlanders.

Natural England (NE) created its upland ecosystem service pilots to test the EsA and develop a methodology for implementing it. Working closely with a wide range of partners both public and private, NE staff in the pilot areas (Bassenthwaite, South Pennines and South West Uplands) identified the range of ecosystem services being provided and reached a shared plan for safeguarding and enhancing these services in future. A working typology was developed to assess cultural services, broadly based upon the National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) and also practical experience of delivery on the ground. These were assessed using a range of national and local data

(for example inspiration from landscape). The pilots demonstrated that investment in the natural environment can result in multiple benefits for wildlife, people and society in a cost effective way (Waters, Lusardi & Clark, 2012). Links were fostered between land managers as suppliers of services with those who benefited. A methodology was developed and tested to deliver an integrated EsA on the ground, value service changes, help make the link between changes in land management and service provision, and involve local people in decision making.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is primarily taking the second option outlined above, with its new Natural Resource Management Planning based on an EsA. In taking this forward, NRW is developing a new integrated, area-based planning approach, which provides a framework for delivery. Utilising the evidence, tools and processes which have been developed as part of the EsA, NRW will be testing how these translate into practice through area specific trials. These natural resource management trials have been set up in the Dyfi, Rhondda and Tawe catchments. They will be considering, and testing, all aspects of the EsA, including the integration of CES into delivery. The trial will review what tools are needed in practice, what evidence is required and where that can be obtained, and what advice or guidance should be developed to inform delivery. This will draw on the work on CES which has already been undertaken through for example the United Kingdom National Ecosystem Assessment follow on projects (Church et al. 2014; Kenter et al. 2014), testing out how this works in practice, and what changes and adaptations will be required to fully take the 'theory into practice'.

We will draw on examples from the natural environment agencies mentioned to discuss the challenges of 1) taking account of CES from the national to the local level, 2) engaging with stakeholders and communities to identify and better understand local CES, 3) integrating this knowledge into existing decision making processes, 4) working effectively in partnership at a landscape scale to deliver CES and 5) identifying lessons that can be learnt from new approaches that are being tried and tested.

References

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