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Analysis

What are shared and social values of ecosystems?

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ABSTRACT

Social valuation of ecosystem services and public policy alternatives is one of the greatest challenges facing ecological economists today. Frameworks for valuing nature increasingly include shared/social values as a distinct category of values. However, the nature of shared/social values, as well as their relationship to other values, has not yet been clearly established and empirical evidence about the importance of shared/social values for valuation of ecosystem services is lacking. To help address these theoretical and empirical limitations, this paper outlines a framework of shared/social values across five dimensions: value concept, provider, intention, scale, and elicitation process. Along these dimensions we identify seven main, non-mutually exclusive types of shared values: transcendental, cultural/societal, communal, group, deliberated and other-regarding values, and value to society. Using a case study of a recent controversial policy on forest ownership in England, we conceptualise the dynamic interplay between shared/social and individual values. The way in which social value is assessed in neoclassical economics is discussed and critiqued, followed by consideration of the relation between shared/social values and Total Economic Value, and a review of deliberative and non-monetary methods for assessing shared/social values. We conclude with a discussion of the importance of shared/social values for decision-making.

1. Introduction

Social valuation of ecosystem services and public policy alternatives is one of the greatest challenges facing ecological and environmental economics today (Parks and Gowdy, 2013). If we are to achieve such valuation, theoretical and methodological plurality is needed to

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understand and account for the full value of biodiversity and ecosystem services to human wellbeing (Bebbington et al., 2007; TEEB, 2010; Wegner and Pascual, 2011; UK National Ecosystem Assessment [UK NEA], 2011, 2014; Parks and Gowdy, 2013). Yet conventional economic approaches to valuation, including the valuation of non-market benefits of the environment, and the welfare economic theory on which these are based, tend to approach value as one-dimensional, and (ultimately) held by individuals alone. Value to society is thus typically considered through aggregation of individual valuations, with the assumption that these valuations reflect underlying preferences and values (Klamer, 2003). However, such an approach may not capture collective meanings and significance ascribed to natural environments, potentially missing important, shared dimensions of value. Choices about the environment are fundamentally ethical and social, because the preferences we hold as individuals are influenced by socialisation within a particular society, but also because of the environmental impacts that individual behaviour has on others. As Vatn (2009, p. 2210) states: "Through the physical linkages existing in nature, a social interconnectedness is forced upon us. In this context one may ask whether individual preferences are the best basis for social choice."

Deliberative and participatory approaches to environmental valuation and appraisal are increasingly advocated as a way to include the multidimensionality of value within decision-making. While such approaches have considerable advantages, there remains debate about whether they should augment, complement, or replace cost–benefit as the principal tool for welfare assessment (O'Neill, 1996; Price, 2000; Holland, 2002b; Bebbington et al., 2007; Wegner and Pascual, 2011; Parks and Gowdy, 2013). In relation to resource management, notions of communal values and 'collective intentionality' also give rise to the need to fulfil communal obligations in parallel with strategies to maximise individual welfare (Ishihara and Pascual, 2012). Recent frameworks for ecosystem valuation, such as those developed by the UK NEA (2011, 2014), The Economics of the Environment and Biodiversity (TEEB, 2010) and the Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES; Haines-Young and Potschin, 2012), include 'shared', 'social' or 'shared social' values as a distinguishable value category. There is also governmental interest in analytical methods and quantitative measures for social and shared values for nature (Fish et al., 2011a, 2011b; Fujiwara and Campbell, 2011; Maxwell et al., 2011). However, in the literature these terms refer to a wide range of overlapping concepts and the theoretical basis for such concepts and their inter-relationships is weak. Gaining clarity about shared and social values is essential for decision-makers to better manage conflicts over natural resources, assess the social impacts of policy and develop effective environmental management strategies (White et al., 2009; Fish et al., 2011b; Kenter et al., 2014; UK NEA, 2011, 2014).

Contemplating shared and social values inevitably leads to questions about the relationship between broad, ethical values (in the sense of guiding principles), contextual or attitudinal values (in the sense of worth or importance), and value in the sense of a monetary measure. Further questions relate to how preferences are shaped, whether there is an identifiable category of values that are shared socially and not obtained by the aggregation of individual monetary valuations, whether or when such values should be elicited, and when it is sufficient to aggregate individual monetary valuations to obtain a collective sense of significance. This then leads to questions about whether or when shared values can be sufficiently accounted for by adapting and improving neoclassical economic valuation methods (such as contingent valuation and cost–benefit analysis) or whether new or additional approaches are needed to obtain the full contribution that ecosystems make to human wellbeing. This paper will explore these questions through a consideration of how shared and social values can be conceptualised. In so doing, the paper seeks to clarify the main terms associated with these values, provide definitions and examine how shared values might be assessed.

This paper focuses primarily on environmental valuation. *Valuation* is therefore distinguished from *valuing*. We consider the latter as an informal, largely implicit process not bound to any particular setting, while the former relates to formal research, analysis or decision-making processes where values (of various types) are explicitly expressed (e.g., in surveys or workshops) or deduced (e.g., through content analysis of media). The purpose of valuation, as discussed here, is to provide knowledge about the value of ecosystems and their services as a contribution to environmental decision-making, monitoring and management processes. While there have been decades of valuation evidence produced with the explicit aim of helping policy-makers take better account of environmental benefits and costs when making decisions, this evidence has largely failed to translate into tangible improvements in terms of environmental outcomes (Jordan and Russel, 2014; Turnpenny et al., 2014). The issue is therefore not just one of knowledge gaps, but also of knowledge acquisition and utilisation. Some consider that environmental valuation and appraisal on the basis of aggregated individual values has reached the limits of welfare economics, and that a more social approach to valuation has the potential to provide a more convincing and legitimate evidence base (Farber et al., 2002; Parks and Gowdy, 2013), or form a complementary assessment providing a more comprehensive suite of evidence overall (Sagoff, 1998; Bebbington et al., 2007; Fujiwara and Campbell, 2011). While we focus here on shared and social values in the context of the environment, concerns around the need for their inclusion, and the limits of conventional welfare economics in this respect, are also increasingly recognised in other fields, such as valuation of health services (e.g., Cleary et al., 2011; Mooney et al., 2002). Given the importance of shared and social values for making decisions, this paper will thus have wide relevance to academics and practitioners across different valuation fields.

The paper first discusses how the terms 'shared', 'social' and 'shared social' values have been used in the literature. It then establishes a theoretical framework that outlines five dimensions for distinguishing different interpretations of shared and social values: value *type*, *provider*, the *process* used to elicit values, the *intention* of value and the *scale*. Along these dimensions, seven main categories of shared and social values are identified (Table 1). How shared values relate to individual values is then considered using a case study on forest ownership in England. This is followed by a discussion and critique of neoclassical approaches to economic environmental valuation and the relation between shared and social values and Total Economic Value (TEV). A range of monetary and non-monetary methods for assessing such values are reviewed. Finally, we discuss the relevance of shared and social values for decision-making in different spheres, and future research avenues are identified.

2. Conceptions of shared and social values

Within the fields of ecosystem assessment and environmental valuation, 'shared values', 'social values', and 'shared social values' have encompassed a wide diversity of meaning. This section provides some examples of how these different terms have been conceptualised in the literature. The aim here is to highlight the breadth of interpretations rather than to provide a fully comprehensive review or conclusive definition.

2.1. Shared values

The term 'shared values' has often been used to refer to guiding principles and normative values that are shared by groups or communities or to refer to cultural values more generally. Daily et al. (2009) argued that the shared values of ecosystems refer to underlying cultural values that might help shape the institutions necessary to make the ecosystem services framework operational. In an examination of policy analysis and aggregation of values, Sagoff (1986) discussed shared values as synonymous with what he also called 'public values': "*goals or intentions the*