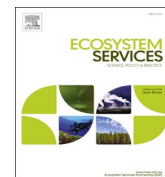




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Ecosystem services and the idea of shared values



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ABSTRACT

Ecosystem services conceptualise the diverse values that ecosystems provide to humanity. This was recognised in the United Kingdom's National Ecosystem Assessment, which noted that appreciation of the full value of ecosystem services requires recognition of values that are shared. By operationalising the shared values concept, it is argued that the contribution of ecosystem services to human well-being can be represented more holistically. This paper considers current understanding of shared values and develops a new metanarrative of shared values beyond the aggregated utilities of individuals. This metanarrative seeks to conceptualise how values can be held both individually and communally, and what this means for identifying their scale and means of enumeration. The paper poses a new reading of the *idea* of shared values that reconciles the elicitation of pre-formed individual values with the formation and expression of shared social values. The implication is that shared values need to be conceived as normative constructs that are derived through social processes of value formation and expression. Shared values thus do not necessarily exist a priori; they can be deliberated through formal and informal processes through which individuals can separate their own preferences from a broader metanarrative about what values ought to be shared.

1. Introduction

Ecosystem services (ES) constitute a systemic framework conceptualising the diversity of interconnected values that ecosystems provide to humanity, many of which may be degraded or lost through solely utilitarian exploitation (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). This plurality of values, found in many pioneering ES classifications, was reflected in the qualitatively distinct categories of provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural ES recognised by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), all of which were understood to be fundamental to an equally plural suite of human well-being outcomes (Everard et al., 1995; Irvine et al., 2013). In valuing ES, conventional economics focuses on 'narrow' measures of efficiency, in contrast to ecological economics, which encompasses broader notions of sustainability (Farley, 2012). In making this distinction, Farley recognised that the economic valuation of ES had largely been conceptualised in

neoclassical economic terms, assuming that aggregation of individual preferences can reflect societal-level valuation (see Brown, 2013; Kenter et al., 2015; Ravenscroft, 2010). This apparent mismatch – between the atomised individual and the complexity of ecosystems – was acknowledged in the United Kingdom's National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA, 2011) and the UK NEA Follow-on (UK NEAFO, 2014) which highlighted the potential of shared values to reflect the contribution of ES to human well-being (Fish et al., 2011) and by subsequent work to develop and operationalise the shared values concept (Kenter et al., 2014b).

This new work has developed a better understanding of the relationship between individual and shared values and the techniques for eliciting or forming such values (Brown, 2013; Kenter, 2016a; Raymond et al., 2014). However, a focus on operationalisation also has the capacity to mask what for us are deeper and more fundamental questions about the goals of economic valuation: what does it really

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mean to conceptualise ES in terms of values that are shared, and what does this tell us about the potential utility of shared values in policy making? In posing these questions, we do not wish to rehearse extant definitional work (Ives and Kendal, 2014; Kenter et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2014; Scholte et al., 2015), but rather to explore the potential for understanding how we can value ES in a new way that reflects the deep and collective meanings that we ascribe to natural environments. While remaining consistent with conventional economic approaches in terms of seeking to understand the relative value of one course of action over another, our aim here is to move away from the assumption that this can be achieved by reference to the aggregate of individual utilities alone. Instead, we wish to expand the concept of social value to include both individual utility and the broader shared meanings and significance attributed to natural environments that are potentially missing from conventional economic approaches. As Kenter et al. (2015: p. 87) observe: “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.” We have conceptualised this expanded aim of assessing and enhancing value to society through the *idea* of shared values. In developing this concept we suggest that in addition to individual utility, there are forms of value that are held in common, and that these values are formed and shaped through shared social processes. By adopting this approach we argue that policy decisions can revolve around values that focus on the common, not just the individual, good. In developing our argument, this paper is intended to be both exploratory and conceptual, with the purpose of inviting readers to join with us in unpacking both the *idea* and the power of shared values.

Our starting point is that the conventional approach to the economics of the environment is at a crossroads, because it has reached the limits of its ability to relate individual to shared and social values, at least within the neoclassical paradigm. For Sagoff (1986: p. 302), this is because shared values (which he also termed ‘public values’) are normative – values that the individual ascribes to others in an ‘impersonal’ (or extra-personal) context that cannot be identified by reference to that individual alone. He argues that shared values cannot fully emerge from standard neoclassical valuation methods that seek to elicit and aggregate individual values, and instead proposed the use of deliberative and political processes to establish value to society. Kenter et al. (2015) add to this analysis by arguing that there are also technical problems associated with all forms of decision-making that cause particular issues when related to the aggregation of individual preferences. For example, complex rules are required on how to aggregate both within dimensions (i.e. how much does each individual count?) and across dimensions of valuation (i.e. how much does each value criterion count?). Following Arrow’s impossibility theorem, it is apparent that individual preference patterns can exist such that it is impossible to derive a social ranking that meets certain minimal conditions: consistency, non-dictatorship, universality, monotonicity, and independence. This suggests that there is no logically infallible way to compare, let alone aggregate, the preferences of diverse individuals (Arrow, 1950; Feldman, 1987). Even if this were achieved, this does not mean that the sum of those individual preferences necessarily equates to the total value to society. As Parks and Gowdy (2012) observed, if it is assumed that individual values are a function of the revealed and stated preferences of self-regarding, narrowly rational individuals, what *rational* way is there to aggregate these preferences to form anything other than the sum of individual preferences?

For us, these issues are insurmountable within the current economic paradigm. How can a ‘group morality’ exist in the context of individual preferences when ‘the mere pursuit of individual ends is harmful to the ends and peace of the whole... and hence in the end to the individual’ (Mauss, 1954: p. 75)? In contrast to the conventional elicitation of data on individual utility-based benefits and costs, the *idea* of shared values – starting from Sagoff’s (1998: p. 215) notion of

‘society should’ – views values as a relational input to debate about what is best for society. In place of the conventional process of value capture, therefore, we suggest that valuation becomes primarily a process of value formation and expression (see: Kenter et al. 2016b and Kenter et al., 2016c), generating data to inform debate, which in turn informs policy. This, for us, is no less than a paradigm shift that invites new work in research and policy formation on shared values in relation to ES. In place of the apparent schism between the collection of essentially pre-formed value data and its subsequent policy application, often in a rather narrower technical paradigm (see Mace et al., 2011), we suggest that novel approaches to, and understandings of, deliberation have the potential to offer new insights into the formation and expression of shared values. Take, as an example, research on the knowledge controversies associated with flooding in England, UK (Landström et al., 2011; Whatmore, 2009). While not referring explicitly to ES, the research team use a participatory co-produced approach to flood risk knowledge as a means of forming and expressing a body of values and knowledges that ‘redistributes’ expertise away from professionals and towards local people with local knowledges. Similarly, Ranger et al. (2016) provide an example of opening the knowledge and perspectives of fishing communities and policy makers up for debate to establish shared values around implementation options for a marine protected area, through a combination of ethnography and group deliberation.

Approaches such as these, we suggest, are starting to embed the *idea* of shared values in both research and novel, more participatory approaches to policy formulation. Indeed, such approaches offer the intriguing possibility that shared values are (co)produced (and reproduced) on a case-by-case basis; that they do not exist at a supra-level awaiting elucidation by an enlightened economist, but rather are formed (and re-formed) as specific circumstances require. Not only does this suggest that it is possible to integrate a significant level of public agency in generating the evidence required for policy-making, but it also implies that there is potentially a new socioeconomic metanarrative of value beyond that of the individual. Thus, the *idea* of shared values suggests an (eco)systemic approach to understanding human and human/other than human relations that has considerable potential in offering new ways to understand the power and potential of ecosystem services.

We commence this paper with a review of how shared values have been understood and constructed in several key domains of literature before offering an exploration of a knowledge controversy arising in England, UK, around forests and forest ownership. From this foundation we then develop and characterise a potential new reading of the *idea* of shared values and how they might be operationalised to provide new evidence-based insights into environmental and other policy arenas.

2. Current understandings of shared values

Current understandings of shared values are far from settled; indeed, some aspects of their conceptualisation remain highly contested, certainly around the extent to which individuals have pre-formed values that can be elicited in ways that imply that these values are shared (Kenter et al., 2015). In this section, we reflect on what is known about shared values in order to identify specific components that we can develop in our subsequent arguments. This section is informed by a literature review conducted as part of the UK NEA Follow-on initiative that addressed shared, plural, social and cultural values (Kenter et al., 2014b). The review included both a rapid evidence assessment (REA) focused on non-economic literature and three expert reviews on (1) economic conceptions of shared values, (2) deliberation and social learning, and (3) spiritual and aesthetic values. A REA provides an overview of existing research based on systematic searches around a (constrained) topic and a synthesis of the evidence provided by identified studies (DFID, 2015; Khangura et al. 2012). The REA

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