



An arts-led dialogue to elicit shared, plural and cultural values of ecosystems



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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces arts-led dialogue as a critical alternative to the prevailing instrumental and deliberative approaches to environmental valuation and decision-making. The dialogue, directed by an artist in collaboration with a community of participants, can comprise a single event, such as a workshop, or unfold over a period of years. Rather than seeking closure on a pre-determined problem, its intentions are typically to explore a subject or problem in original, challenging or provocative ways, which question the truth claims of any one discipline, at times with unexpected, emancipatory outcomes. We locate arts-led dialogue between deliberative and interpretive approaches to environmental decision-making, and within the history and theory of socially-engaged art, and analyse its key features: its purpose, participation, audience, format, content, and changes in values and identities through transformative learning. We illustrate these features by reporting on a creative enquiry into the shared, plural and cultural values associated with the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland, focusing on the Black Wood of Rannoch in Highland Perthshire. The conclusions highlight two distinctive features: a commitment to critical dialogue and open exchange, and the character and experience of the artist who directs the process.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

There has been significant debate in the literature on ecosystem services valuation and environmental decision-making between two competing axiological and methodological perspectives: first, ‘instrumental’ approaches based on the aggregation of individual preferences using tools such as cost-benefit analysis and, secondly, deliberative valuation procedures that allow values to be formed through communicatively rational debate between participants acting as free and equal citizens (Fish et al., 2011; Kenter et al., 2014a, 2016a, 2016b; O’Neill et al., 2008; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016; Owens et al., 2004; Raymond et al., 2014). This paper outlines elements of a third approach, novel to the ecosystem services field, which addresses limitations of both the instrumental and conventional deliberative approaches. Grounded in the theory and history of socially-engaged art, we refer to it as ‘arts-led dialogue’. Although it is led by artists, it does not necessarily involve the production of art in the traditional sense of a painting or sculpture. Instead, the process of communication with an engaged community of participants becomes the artist’s ‘medium’ and arguably represents the

‘artwork’ itself (although it is unlikely to be referred to as such). By bringing an artist’s aesthetic attention to the historical, cultural and institutional context of a topic or issue, and maintaining a critical distance from established agendas and forms of knowledge, the dialogue can lead to unexpected insights and outcomes, which more conventional approaches might fail to recognize or realize (Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2004, 2011, 2012; Koh, 2015; Thompson, 2012).

We begin the paper with a critique of the model of decision-making that informs both instrumental and deliberative approaches. We argue that a decision is rarely a discrete event, involving the consideration of facts and values as part of a specific deliberative process. Instead, decisions emerge from organizational routines, procedures, habits and norms (O’Neill et al., 2008; Simon, 1997). This realisation redirects our attention away from the production of evidence to support individual decisions, and towards efforts to understand, appraise, and influence historical patterns of decisions and actions, and the institutions through which these are played out. Such a focus is largely missing from the discourse of ecosystem services. It creates a conceptual space to appreciate how an arts-led approach might, intentionally or otherwise, influence environmental decision-making, and offer a necessary corrective to the application of conventional instrumental and delib-

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erative approaches.

In the next section, we outline recent developments in art theory and practice that have resulted in dialogue being regarded as a kind of socially-engaged art. We identify key features that can be used to characterize arts-led dialogue in relation to established deliberative approaches: their purpose, participation, audiences, format and content. In particular, we explore their capacity to form and transform both values and identities referring to the Deliberative Value Formation (DVF) model of Kenter et al. (2016). Section 3 illustrates the approach as practiced by the authors in relation to the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland. We outline the activities, events, conversations and outcomes that have comprised the process to date. In conclusion, we note that the approach is dependent upon the professional experience and character of the artist, who applies his or her aesthetic attention to negotiate its direction, form and creative outputs. Given the unpredictable and, at times, critical nature of the intervention, we highlight the potentially important role of intermediaries, working with a host institution, who understand the role of the artist, and can support the process towards successful outcomes.

1.2. Instrumentality, deliberation and decision-making

The critique of the dominant instrumental approach to ecosystem service valuation and environmental decision-making is now well-rehearsed (Kenter et al., 2016a; Jordan and Russel, 2014; Owens et al., 2004). Grounded in neo-classical economics it follows the logic of cost-benefit analysis by assessing the impacts of alternative options on a range of ecosystem services. These are expressed where possible in monetary terms, and aggregated to identify the option that maximizes welfare (e.g. Braat and de Groot, 2012; Verkerk et al., 2014). As argued elsewhere in this issue, the approach is incompatible with a growing acceptance that values are plural and incommensurable and cannot be aggregated with a single measure. It also assumes that the values of individuals are purely self-interested (Kenter et al., 2014a; Kenter et al., 2016; Hausman, 1993). The approach also struggles to address the unequal distribution of costs and benefits across society (O'Neill et al., 2008). Importantly it also assumes that values are fixed and pre-formed rather than uncovered, created or transformed through dialogue (Irvine et al. 2016; Kenter et al., 2016a). In practice, it is likely that most types of value that are shared across society (e.g. transcendental, social, cultural, communal and contextual) would not be fully captured or understood using this approach (Kenter et al., 2014a).

To overcome these limitations, deliberative methods are increasingly proposed, such as in-depth discussion groups, visioning workshops and citizens' juries (Kenter et al., 2014a; Smith, 2003). In particular, its proponents highlight how preferences (or contextual values) are not pre-formed but generated through deliberation and learning (Christie et al., 2012; Kenter et al., 2014a; Parks and Gowdy, 2012; Spash 2008). This is done by creating opportunities for individuals to express, exchange, reflect, negotiate and develop their views and evidence in response to those of others (Stern and Fineberg, 1996; Kenter et al., 2014a). The outputs might include priority lists, recommendations and verdicts (Kenter et al., 2014a), which reflect the deliberated preferences of the group for a number of options as a means to support decision-making. The approach raises difficult questions around representation, especially of excluded groups, future generations and non-human actors (O'Neill et al., 2008; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016). Given the complementary strengths of the two approaches, various hybrids combine deliberation with formal tools into 'analytical-deliberative' approaches such as multi-criteria analysis (Fish et al., 2011; Kenter, 2016a; Kenter, 2016c; Kenter et al., 2016b; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016; Ranger et al., 2016).

In their ideal forms, the two approaches, instrumental and deliberative, can be seen as a contrast between substantive and procedural forms of rationality, and represent different ethical positions (O'Neill et al., 2008). Instrumental approaches such as cost-benefit analysis are

'consequentialist' (Cooper et al., 2016), grounded in substantive rationality; they assume that "the right decision is the one that produces the best outcome" (e.g. it maximizes well-being). In contrast, deliberative approaches follow a procedural rationality that looks backwards at the process that was followed rather than forwards at the consequences, and assumes that "a good decision is the one that is the outcome of rational deliberation" (O'Neill et al., 2008: 204; Simon, 1979).

Despite this fundamental difference, both approaches share a view of decision-making as consisting of discrete events that can be appraised in relative isolation from their historical and institutional context (O'Neill et al., 2008). In their ideal forms, both follow a similar sequence of steps. For the instrumental approach, as prescribed by the UK Treasury Green Book, options are appraised through economic modeling of costs and benefits (HMT, 2003) while, with deliberation, options are identified, and preferences formed, through the exchange of well-informed and reasoned opinions (Kenter et al., 2016a; Habermas, 1989; Daniels and Walker, 1996; O'Neill et al., 2008). In practice, deliberative methods are seen to be more useful in the early stages when options are developed, while analytic-deliberative and instrumental approaches support the assessment stage where options are appraised (Kenter, 2016a). Attempts to refine this model of decision-making to conform better to reality highlight, for example, the iterations between the steps in the cycle (Fish et al., 2011) rather than addressing institutional structures and procedures, which shape or constrain individual decisions and the use of option appraisal itself (Atkinson, 2015; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, both are conceived as ways to support some form of option appraisal, and hence make recommendations to an individual or group who then arrive at a 'moment of decision'. However, as argued by O'Neill et al. (2008) decisions are rarely discrete events – although retrospectively they might be characterized as such. They emerge from organizational routines, procedures, habits and norms rather than from a specific deliberative process. To understand and appraise decisions we need to understand these procedures and structures of power, and how they shape, and are shaped by, historical patterns of decisions and choices. This view is supported by an alternative, virtues-based approach to decision-making, which, drawing from Aristotle, recognises the inter-relationship between the character of individuals or institutions and the decisions they make (O'Neill et al., 2008).

A separate critique of the 'technical-rational' model of decision-making, grounded in empirical research into knowledge utilization, also challenges the assumption that knowledge flows in a linear fashion to support rational decision-makers, which is then used to improve decisions (Jordan and Russel, 2014; Nutley et al., 2007; Sanderson, 2002; Weiss, 1979). Alternatives models include: the conceptual (or enlightenment) model, where a body of knowledge shapes a policy agenda; the strategic model, where knowledge is used tactically by actors in a politicized venue, and the co-production model, where knowledge is constructed through interaction between knowledge users and producers (Jordan and Russel, 2014; Weiss, 1979; Dunlop, 2014). This body of research resonates with the historical and institutional understanding put forward by O'Neill et al. (2008). However, its value lies in helping us to understand, and hence improve, the production and utilization of evidence (e.g. the outputs of instrumental and deliberative approaches to environmental valuation) in its organizational context. The approach of O'Neill et al. suggests we understand and appraise the 'character' of an organization – its structures, procedures, habits and norms – which, in turn, could help reorient historical patterns of decisions and choices into the future.

While both perspectives are clearly important, this wider focus opens up a conceptual space where an arts-led dialogue can play a distinctive role. To help locate arts-led dialogue within the spectrum of approaches to ecosystem valuation, we make a distinction between 'deliberation' and 'dialogue', where – drawing from a range of definitions – deliberation is 'the act of considering the reasons for and

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