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A Social Landscape Perspective on People and Places in Amenity-Rich Rural Regions

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Introduction

Trends in research and practice in natural resource management identify human behavior and social systems as important dimensions of ecosystem management. Natural components of ecosystems include people and communities, plants and animals, minerals and chemicals, and air and soil. Knowledge of human social and cultural systems is essential for proper understanding of selected changes in biological systems, monitoring biodiversity and habitat fragmentation, development and implementation of resource management strategies, and an appreciation of how non-human biophysical elements of the ecosystem influence human attitudes and behaviors.

Several reasons for moving towards an integrated, socially constructed landscape framework exist. First, the adoption of ecosystem management practices by public land management agencies requires an assemblage of data, variables, and measures at a macro-level scale to understand the relationships between managed land ecosystems, human populations, and human communities. Second, biological scientists and park, forest, and wilderness managers recognize that people and social systems are vital components of the ecological equation and their needs, interests, and behaviors need to be incorporated into management decision-making strategies. Third, measures of the natural landscape mirror measures in demography, human ecology, and community studies (Field et al. 2003) suggesting the use of a landscape ecology framework to integrate social, biological, and ecological science at comparable scales. Our purpose is to reinvigorate inquiry into the interrelationships of social organization, culture, and the biophysical environment in space and time. This paper's goal is to generate discussion about the collection, analysis, and use of concatenated social and natural resource base data to more fully understand the interactions between social and biological systems.

Toward a graphical representation

To anchor our work, we provide a perspective on the complex multilayer relationships between the social and biophysical worlds. Figure 1 summarizes the three main dimensions: the landscape, community, and individual land parcel. Three interdependent axes—the spatial, temporal, and theoretical—are highlighted since they are critical to the character of landscapes, community, and individual land holdings. The first two axes highlight the importance of space and time at each level of analysis, as well as between levels. By depicting these relationships as occurring across landscapes, over the variety of community types, spanning

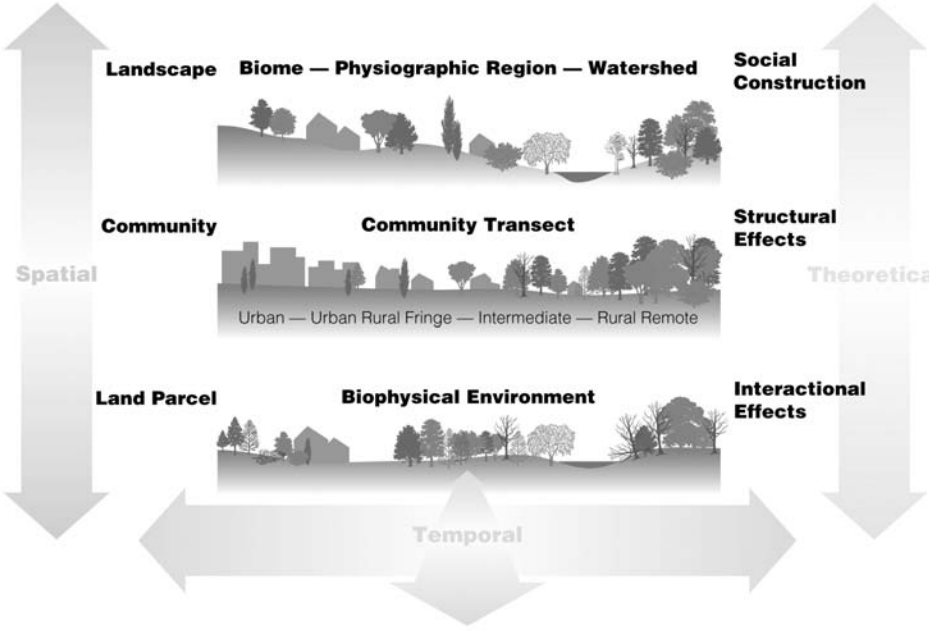

Figure 1. Integrating human behavior, community structure, and ecosystem change across time and space.

the range of land parcels, this multilayer perspective reflects the role played by space and time. It directs attention to the history, context, and size of a geographic area, as well as the extent to which changes occur over time. The third axis reflects that knowledge about these interrelationships is informed by theory. Through the application of theory, the science of landscape perspectives on people and places in amenity-rich rural regions is advanced.

Each level is characterized by a continuum reflecting differences in levels of interaction across the social and biophysical systems, contributing to different configurations of human–natural resource space. How the landscape is studied depends on the research question. It can range from a watershed to a bioregion or the biosphere. At the community level, the figure reflects typical settlement patterns, from rural remote areas to densely settled urban centers. Different patterns emerge within each of these ecosystems as reflected in our perspective of the land parcel.

Protocols for studying the complex multilevel spatial and temporal relationships between landscape, community, and land parcel dimensions are necessary. A transect approach can help frame such work. Through its application a researcher can capture the most human-influenced environment at one extreme and a more remote natural environment where human influences are minimal at the other (the horizontal axis in Figure 1).

We see nestedness (vertical axis) among levels of analysis. Understanding individual land parcels helps inform an understanding of community organization, which in turn is reflected in the landscape. When descriptions of individual land parcels are studied together, a frame of the geographical bounds of community is developed. If descriptions of communities are combined, a socio-biological or -geographical landscape is defined.

Integrating a theoretical perspective

Three complementary frameworks influence our work—social construction (Greider and Garkovich 1994; Bridger 1996), structural effects (Blau 1960), and interactional effects (Wilkinson 1991). Interdependence of social landscapes, community structure, and individual land parcels is this paper's core. The social construction of natural resources, informed by their structural and interactional parameters, facilitates multilevel, temporal, and spatial analyses.

Human ecologists, geographers, and community scholars have explored social behavior, social organization, and institutional structure at a spatial scale for a long time (Galpin 1915; Kolb 1933). This reflects space as an ever-present element in human interaction and interdependence (Hawley 1950). It plays a central role in the basic social relations characteristic of individuals at home, in a cafe, sitting on a park bench, at the beach, in a campground (Burch 1965), or in a public park or forest. Behavior shapes space and space shapes behavior. How humans socially construct space gives it identity.

Socially constructed landscapes

Early scholars focused on spatial analyses of human behavior to understand the organization of rural life. Galpin's work focused on rural trade centers and was premised on his belief that rural communal survival depended upon a towns' relationship with its surrounding countryside. Each village or city center was surrounded by a zone of land, irregular in shape and subject to expansion and contraction with the ebb and flow of community growth (1915:6). Kolb replicated this work and studied patterns of social interaction among rural residents along spatial dimensions. This helped him define rural social networks and identify trends in the growth and decline of socially constructed neighborhoods (Kolb 1933). Regional demographers including Vance (1935) linked agricultural production regions with population and settlement and called them cultural landscapes. He felt that such landscapes informed the configuration of socially constructed land forms (Vance 1935:14).

There has been much more recent work. Altman and Zube (1979) studied public places and pleasuring grounds. Edgerton (1979) focused on the social order of a California beach and noted its changing nature with early morning use by families with children, late afternoons by teenagers and other single adults, and early evening by mature couples. Burch (1965) found that the dynamic nature of changing campers acting out various rituals defined the campground's social order. Lee's urban park study (1972) indicated how people transformed recreational spaces into their own culture and experiences. Clark and Stankey (1979) emphasized the sociocultural background of campers together with local facilities that provided a social definition of place. Cheek et al. (1977) indicated that a mutual influence of the group recreating and the kinds of facilities available that led to social imprints on natural resources. Others described the constructed landscapes of inner cities: gang lands, no-man's lands (Whyte 1955), night as frontier (Melbin 1978), and the differences in social order between neighborhood tavern and cocktail lounge (Gottleib 1957).

Clearly, social meaning of space varies with time and season and individual or group in that space. Fitchen captured the essence of socially constructed landscapes when she wrote that "The land that makes up rural space includes ... one's privately owned land [and the]

entire landscape that surrounds people. [It] is a ... space in which people operate ... and ... space has the power to modify activities that take place within it (1991:250–251).

Thus, space can be viewed as the biophysical environment and acts as the backdrop or stage for human activities. The socially constructed landscape is inextricably linked and reciprocally related to the biophysical environment. Greider and Garkovich (1994:1) said that landscapes were "symbolic environments created by the human act of conferring meaning to nature and the environment."

We define socially constructed landscapes as *spatial areas in which the socio-cultural and institutional structure has meaning for and frames the ecological questions being addressed.* The landscape concept implies a diverse collection of social, cultural, and biological features linked across time and space. Moreover, both social and biophysical landscapes are dynamic entities whose meaning changes across varying temporal and spatial scales. Ecological meaning is a product of the distribution of humans and of human behavior in varying biophysical settings. Equivalent human behavior does not have equivalent ecological implications across diverse biophysical settings. Nor do equivalent biophysical settings engender equivalent human behavior within a particular biophysical landscape since a diversity of cultural attributes, attitudes, and values significantly impact natural resources.

Structural effects and social construction

Blau suggested there were two kinds of social facts. The "first was the common values and norms embodied in culture or subculture," and the "second [was] embodied in the networks of social relations in which the processes of social interaction become organized and through which social positions of individuals and subgroups become differentiated" (Blau 1960:178). He also distinguished macro-attributes (community and cultural characteristics of the social structure) from individual behavior and values and indicated that there was a difference between a value's prevalence in a community or group and whether an individual held that value (1960:180).

We have interest in both sets of facts. The first provides an understanding of the context for human action, while the second focuses on the networks of social actors who make communities function. Both are central to address the changes facing rural communities in amenity-rich regions (McGranahan 1999). The structural effects of these shifts have direct consequences for public land management issues and require an ability to analytically distinguish values and behavior held by individuals from common values vested in the community. Each must be measured separately.

We also need a better understanding of the growing disconnect between new landowners and long-term residents in amenity-rich areas. Seasonal and permanent residents own land for different reasons (cf. Field et al. 2005; Krannich et al. 2005).With increased fragmentation and parcelization creating increased opportunities for increased ownerships, the difficulties of properly managing forested lands are exacerbated (Egan and Luloff 2005).

Interactional effects

Interactional theory begins with an assumption that the community is the primary setting for contact between the individual and society. While recognizing that there have been massive changes in social life (e.g., Warren 1978), and that community is not the holistic,

integrated unit it once was, the local community remains a critical aspect of people's lives from the interactional perspective, which routinely identifies three components: (1) a shared geographic territory or locale; (2) a local society comprising social institutions, organizations, and associations; and (3) collective actions and mutual identity, usually emerging as a result of actors' participation in associational action. Through the latter interactions people develop a social definition of self and beliefs about how society operates. As indicated by Wilkinson (1991:17): "Community ... is a natural disposition among people who interact ... on matters that comprise a common life."

When people share a common life, a local orientation emerges. This orientation is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for creating shared, generalized bonds, that "cuts across and links special interest activities within the local territory" (Wilkinson 1991:37). When crosscutting and generalized bonds exist, special-interest demands are minimized. Where collective community interests and actions are well established, collaborative processes and broad-based cooperation in response to threats emerge more readily than in places dominated by special interests and fragmented communal ties.

Testing our conceptual framework

Our research in southwest Utah can be used to illustrate how our social landscape framework can help to enhance understanding of key patterns of change occurring across time and space and across dimensions of social organization. This area is characterized by vast tracts of public lands. Its eastern portions encompass parts of the Colorado Plateau, where high-desert sagebrush tracts are interspersed among towering redrock structures, deep slot canyons, and forested, snow-capped mountains. Extending westward, it encompasses both high-elevation forested lands of the Markagunt Plateau and lower-elevation arid deserts representing a transition to the vast Basin and Range geographic province.

Over time, some portions of this area have experienced limited landscape changes, biophysically or socially. This reflects management practices that preserve large tracts as undeveloped lands utilized primarily for recreation or seasonal grazing. Other portions have exhibited dramatic changes in population size, land use patterns, resource utilization, and social organization. This is particularly evident in portions of Washington County. Fifty years ago this previously remote locale was a sparsely populated desert area with a combined county population of about 10,000. Then, economic activity centered on irrigated agriculture and tourist trade associated with the presence of Zion National Park contributed to unprecedented growth rates and development.

Our transect approach demonstrates the spatial patterning of growth and change at the landscape level. Located less than five hours south of the Salt Lake City metropolitan area, Washington County has become a popular warm-weather destination for golfers, recreationists, and retirees seeking a warmer place to live, year-round or seasonally. This location is also about a two-hour drive northeast of Las Vegas and has become a popular destination for seasonal home owners and recreationists from there. We can also apply the spatial transect approach within our study area to illuminate patterns of human settlement and land development (first the growth centered around St. George but now has extended in all directions, especially northeast along the I-15 corridor toward the Virgin River corridor and Zion

National Park, and west toward a spatially distinct area surrounding Santa Clara and north toward the Pine Valley mountains).

Population growth over the past decades has generated sprawling residential and commercial development in former pristine desert landscapes, irrigated cotton and alfalfa fields, vineyards, and orchards. With the expansion of the spatial footprint of urbanized land uses, formerly remote rural areas have been transformed into the rural–urban fringe, and those once part of the rural–urban fringe now are within a continuously urbanized landscape.

In sum, our model and study site provide evidence that social constructions helped spur patterns of land and resource utilization that do not occur if they are not broadly shared. Structural effects of individual as well as collective values and norms that prioritized economic growth and private property rights also served to foster development and resource utilization patterns here. And actions that emerged from collective interactions based on shared interests and locality-based bonds reflect a dynamic interplay between the social and the biophysical components of the landscape setting.

Conclusion

Contemporary trends transforming rural landscapes surrounding public lands require integrated social and biological information that can be used to foster relevant policy formation by decision-makers. Our framework facilitates this. Mills (1959), Merton (1967), and Sorokin (1965) alerted us to the traps of engaging analytical, fact-finding efforts in the absence of synthesizing, generalizing work. There is a clear need for studies and theories of the middle range if we want to advance work. As noted elsewhere, rural sociologists have attempted to integrate biological systems to better understand human behavior on the land (Field, Luloff, and Krannich 2002). The social organization of rural America has always been a story of the relations of people and natural resource systems.

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