

Managing the Intangible

Sanctuaries of Dreams

When many of us think about parks and protected areas, we envisage landscapes that are associated with concepts such as beauty, space, and “getting away from it all.” For some, these areas are sanctuaries, not just for fauna and flora but for the dreams we hold for our future quality of life (Hales 1989: 144). This seems a large burden to place on protected areas, but many would subscribe to it.

Clearly, the aim of “conserving nature” does not encompass all of the values that are associated with protected areas. This is evident in even a cursory glance at the history of the park movement. Political forces linked to nationalism and Romantic concepts about well-being played a guiding role in the emergence of parks and continue to influence their establishment (e.g., Everhardt 1983). Indeed, many scientists would argue that until recently, biodiversity conservation has never been the primary force behind park creation (e.g., Nix 1997).

In reality, all protected areas are linked to complex intangible values that can be difficult to define or even to reconcile with the core aims of park management agencies. Some of these values, such as the nature lover’s desire to experience quiet or the firsthand sighting of a rare bird, are often easily accommodated. In contrast, others may have a historical, political, or cultural dimension that generate significant emotion and debate. Such values may derive from people’s life history or sense of their own identity and may lead them to question the wisdom of agency actions. This chapter considers whether management can in fact recognize and provide for the multitude of intangible values that are tied to park landscapes.

Defining the Intangible

Intangible values are by their nature difficult to measure or define. Recognizing them presents a challenge, as park management is commonly focused on tangible outcomes. Goals associated with infrastructure, law enforcement, income generation, fire, and pest species are perhaps more easily articulated and translated into management action. Because of this, the values held by a park agency can sometimes overshadow the intangible ones at the heart of a society’s attachment to place.

Intangible values are highly varied. They may include the importance that

an urban person places on the intrinsic existence of a park. This person may feel that the park adds somehow to the quality of the world in which she lives, as well as satisfying her belief in the protection of areas, places, and species from development. At another level, an intangible value may be characterized by a group’s desire to see an event or person commemorated through the protection of a landscape and its associated built heritage. Battlefields, historic sites, or what have been termed “places of shame” where indigenous people have been massacred by colonizers may encapsulate these values.

The concept of nonmaterial values intersects with physical places as well as activities undertaken by people, either singly or in groups. These values may be manifest in indigenous people's attachment to a cultural site or a nonindigenous family's memory of returning each year to the same campsite for holidays. Intangible values may be expressed in these cases by visiting and using these places, thereby bringing people into direct contact with the rules and regulations governing a park.

Underlying this chapter is the key point that protected area boundaries are overlain on environments that have a history of human presence and in many cases a recent or existing human use. This means they cannot be neatly excised from human memory or culturally defined ways of perceiving and valuing landscapes. Parks are embedded in social, economic, and political systems that ensure the values we place on them are linked to ongoing debates about our place in the world.

To some extent, the different classes of protected areas recognize the presence of diverse values and the need for parks to cater to a wide range of activities or functions. It is not possible, however, simply to exclude or erase values from an area of land by classifying it in a particular way. The ongoing debate about "wilderness" in countries like Australia illustrates this well. This concept is opposed by indigenous groups who see these areas as having a human history and meaning. Equally, those who wish to light a fire as part of their bush-camping experience may question the rules of wilderness area managers that forbid such an activity.

The difference in scale between the embers of a camper's fire and the com-

plex ties that bind Aboriginal people to "country" may seem too great to allow us to include them in the same paragraph. This seeming disjunction, however, encapsulates the fact that park management intersects with intangible values on many levels.

Can Intangible Values Be Managed?

Ever since the declaration of the first formal national park at Yellowstone, approaches to managing protected areas have evolved in complex ways. This can be seen in the development of park management agencies around the globe. Today, many combine specialists in disciplines including ecology, law, history, archaeology, and public education. It would appear that this evolution is a response to a number of key factors that reflect our changing understanding of parks. Chief among these in many countries is our growing understanding of ecosystem complexity and the need to integrate protected areas into the management of surrounding tenures and land uses.

This shift in understanding has been matched by increased attention to the intangible values of parks. Despite this, there is a danger that protected area managers encourage or even adopt the myth that their role is to deal primarily with the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem health. Such a view, while attractive, is belied by the day-to-day uses of parks and the continued expression of complex attachments to their landscapes.

Such a view has come under pressure as parks have been established in developing countries where the luxury of setting aside areas of land for "conservation" simply does not exist. Here, park management has come face-to-face with the need to encompass con-

cepts such as resident communities, consumptive uses of wildlife, and the recognition of cultural obligations and interests on land management. The management of an iconic park such as Royal Chitwan in Nepal is a good example (Nepal and Weber 1993).

In developed countries, similar issues have arisen in the face of land claims and the expression of native title interests by indigenous people. In some cases, this has prompted the emergence of jointly managed parks where attempts are being made to develop collaborative approaches that satisfy Western agendas and those of local people. Australia in particular has attempted to tackle this issue in a range of parks, including Uluru-Katajuta and Kakadu in the Northern Territory (DeLacy and Lawson 1997) and Mutawintji in New South Wales. This has forced park agencies to actively consider complex intangible values and their relationship to practical management activities such as the control of fire and pest species and the messages that are conveyed to visitors.

In the same way, the concept of “protected landscapes” has emerged to challenge the view that parks can, or should, be divorced from the historic, economic, and cultural systems in which they are embedded. Lucas (1992) points to the protected landscapes of England, Wales, and France as examples where management must accommodate and value modified lands with mixed uses. The same concept is applied in the Annapurna Conservation Area in Nepal (Stevens 1997).

Overlying these developments is the fact that the last few decades have witnessed significant change in the relationship between the community and government in many countries.

The growth of the environment movement is a central part of this shift and encapsulates the presence of increased community scrutiny of decision making. This has resulted in active combat in the courts and on the picket line that has influenced the outcome of elections. It is no surprise that there has been a burgeoning literature on concepts such as collaborative management and community involvement (e.g., Hunt and Haider 2001). Land management agencies around the world have had to confront and respond to these concepts. This, too, has brought intangible values some visibility as engagement with community members automatically exposes managers to complex values-based issues.

The management of intangible values is brought into relief when we consider interaction between indigenous people and parks. The Western approach is to describe, categorize, and split into different categories. The traditional indigenous approach is often allegorical—to tell a story that illustrates a value, rather than to clearly describe the value itself. A place will often be significant because of many overlapping values, illustrated through both stories and repetitive activities—“It has everything we need to live,” or “It is where we come together each year.” But often the place is felt/seen to have an intrinsic value in and of itself. “We come there every year because it is a special place” (not “It is a special place because we come there every year”). To describe a place in this way is to see oneself within the place, as part of it.

The act of “defining” intangible values is itself not culturally neutral—it comes from the Western scientific tradition. Nonetheless, if we do not de-

fine intangible values in some way, it will be virtually impossible for them to influence management practices.

An implicit assumption in protected area management has been that by managing the physical, we can avoid cultural or subjective biases. This is based on a Western, scientific approach to management. That is, if we can understand the physical properties and relationships of natural resources, we can manage them sustainably. The assumption lying behind this approach is that the values of these resources lie purely in their physical nature. This also implies that we can understand the complex relationships between resources and the forces of nature by understanding their physical nature alone. In its extreme form, this is also an approach that effectively removes human beings and their actions from the ecosystem in order to make it “pure.” The assumption in this case is that if we can just remove all traces of human influence from a protected area (e.g., through environmental cleanup), it will be pure, self-regulating, self-perpetuating wilderness.

Some of the weaknesses of this approach are obvious. If tangible/physical values are articulated separately from intangible values, it will be harder to develop management practices that respect both kinds of values in an integrated fashion. Human beings are part of nature, and there are virtually no places on Earth that have not had human beings as part of their “natural” history. One person’s wilderness is another person’s homeland. Each has its own intangible values in terms of symbolism, aesthetics, cultural meaning, and identity.

Despite growing awareness of this challenge, the concept of intangible

values seems to rarely surface in the mission statements or policies of park management agencies. Understanding of what this concept means and how it interacts with park landscapes is still overshadowed by agency attention to issues that, while inseparable from intangible values, are more easily clothed in the language of science or bureaucracy.

Nuts and Bolts

Numerous activities that can be defined as core business by park agencies, such as fire and pest species management, can be conducted collaboratively with local people in a way that affirms cultural knowledge and people’s intangible values. An obvious example of this is the adoption of Aboriginal firing practices in park management programs in some parts of Australia (Parks Australia 1997). This activates nonmaterial values associated with Aboriginal people’s custodial interests in country and the desire to ensure that their culture is applied and alive.

Local people can possess an intimate knowledge of fauna, flora, land use history, fire, and ecosystem processes that has developed through long-standing interaction with a landscape. Often this knowledge has crossed generations through story and practical experience. This knowledge can be ignored or discarded by park managers who are trained to see parks as tools to redress past human effects on the landscape. At one extreme, parks can be viewed as “wilderness” and in a sense devoid of human values, except for those that champion the preservation of “nature.”

Many other activities, such as the provision of educational tours and information, can actually foster a

response among park visitors that is enriching and significant. People may choose to return to a park where they have had such an experience and, in a sense, weave these visits into their life and personal history. People may also seek to gain understanding of other cultures or ways of life by visiting parks. In Australia, the concept of reconciliation is seen as an important goal of many parks, especially those where visitors can learn from Aboriginal people about how they view the landscape.

To be effective, nonmaterial values need to be explicitly acknowledged by park managers, even where they are seen to conflict with the agency's view of why a park exists and how it should be cared for. This can be as simple as using the indigenous names for fauna and flora or significant landscape features. It can be as complex as maintaining evidence of human-modified landscapes through ongoing intervention or finding resources and strategies to maintain historic structures. Table 1 attempts to explain how some nonmaterial values can be addressed by management actions. This is not a

definitive list, but it reveals the complexity of this issue.

Imagining Country: Intangible Values and the New South Wales Experience

The experience of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Australia, in coming to grips with intangible values in protected areas can be used to illustrate common issues and opportunities. Over the last five years, the agency has invested significant resources in research and planning that seek to engage the diverse intangible values linked to parks. While the effects of this work on park management are still to be properly realized, it reveals some of the steps that an agency must pursue if it is to achieve this aim.

During this time, NPWS's Cultural Heritage Division (CHD) has assessed intangible values in a range of contexts. These include exploration of the values that Aboriginal people attach to biodiversity and environmental health (English 2000, 2002) as well as the ties that bind Europeans to structures and landscapes that have been encom-

Table 1. Some examples of how management can address nonmaterial values.

Nonmaterial value	Management action
Psychological benefit or well-being generated by visiting a park landscape	Provision of access and infrastructure to support activities such as bush walking, camping, and education in ways that respond to the needs of different groups and provide them with a valued experience
Protection of cultural landscapes and valued cultural places	Active assessment of the social and cultural meaning and significance of park landscapes. This might combine active conservation of particular places, research into an area's land use history, and recognition of people's knowledge about the land and of the continued importance of interaction with, and use of, valued places.
Reconciliation between cultures	Joint management, cultural tourism, and education programs
Education and learning	A blend of experiences for park visitors that reflect the multiple values of a protected area
Cultural values and community health	Continued access for indigenous people to carry out cultural practices and recording of people's history and memory
Intrinsic value of landscape processes	Management of ecosystem health

passed within park boundaries (Veale 1997, 2001). Attention has also been given to the values placed on parks in the Australia's multicultural society by looking at how Australians of Macedonian (Thomas 2001) and Vietnamese backgrounds perceive and use park landscapes.

For many decades, intangible values were largely ignored or else not explicitly addressed by the NPWS in its approach to management. The work of the CHD has changed this, primarily because it has shifted itself from an emphasis on archaeological investigations to those that engage living people and their connections to place. This research has raised important issues that articulate intangible values. At its core has been the attempt to "imagine country"—that is, to picture the complex social and cultural links between people and landscapes that reside in memory, feelings, and beliefs.

Protected Areas and First Nations in Canada

In Canada, most legislation providing for the establishment of protected areas focuses on natural values. In fact, natural parks are seen by many as wilderness areas, with as little human impact as possible. However, in the last decade or so, partly as a result of the influence of northern Aboriginal groups in the settlement of land claims, this view has begun to change, and the cultural values of natural parks are beginning to be recognized. However, it is still the case that the identification of areas for consideration of natural parks uses natural criteria identified by Euro-Canadian scientists for determining what areas should be protected. Minor consideration may be given to boundary

adjustments to include important archaeological sites, and once the natural area is identified, its cultural values are then determined. Thus, cultural values are still seen as secondary in this process.

On the other side of the coin, most cultural heritage legislation, with its background in Western historical thinking, focuses on the identification and designation of cultural heritage sites and is particularly suited to dealing with built heritage, such as buildings, and archaeological sites. Intangible cultural values are considered significant, but natural values are rarely considered in the initial identification stages, and then only as being complementary to or a subset of the cultural values. Most natural parks are large geographical areas. Most cultural heritage sites are small geographical areas. In both cases, the legislative and policy process for the establishment and management of these parks and sites reflect this reality. When we identify places with both cultural and natural values, giving their cultural and natural elements equal attention, we must move to a more integrative concept of protected areas, such as cultural landscapes. Cultural landscapes, some of which are quite large by traditional historic site standards, have characteristics that do not fit very well with the sets of legislative and policy processes and mechanisms for either natural parks or cultural heritage sites. They do, however, provide the integration of intangible and tangible, and natural and cultural, values.

Table 2 compares and contrasts protected areas, historic sites, and cultural landscapes in terms of evaluation criteria, size of geographical area, whether subsurface protection is needed, and whether natural and cul-

Table 2. Comparison of protected natural areas, historic sites, and cultural landscapes.

	Protected Natural Area (e.g., National Park)	Historic Sites	Cultural Landscapes
Evaluation criteria	Natural values	Cultural or historic values	Cultural and natural values
Size of geographical area	Large geographical areas to protect ecosystems, watersheds	Small geographical areas to protect buildings, building complexes, and archaeological sites	Large geographical areas to encompass all values
Subsurface protection	Statutory protection of subsurface	No protection of subsurface	Subsurface protection may be needed
Tangible or intangible values	Tangible and intangible values relating to natural features	Tangible and intangible values relating to historic/cultural features	Tangible and intangible values for both natural and cultural features and the landscape as a whole
Balance of natural and cultural values in area management	Cultural or historical values secondary	Natural values secondary	Cultural and natural values integrated

tural values are balanced in the management of the area.

The use of traditional natural parks or cultural heritage site designations can put considerable stress on communities who would like to have their special places recognized and protected from inappropriate development, and bureaucrats who are faced with trying to force-fit park or site proposals into legislative or policy molds that are not really meant for the purpose at

hand.

This is made worse in a situation where Aboriginal communities do not have adequate land tenure to protect these places themselves. On the other hand, governments who have land management responsibilities must answer to many constituencies, including the heritage and environmental lobbies, as well as development and industrial sectors whose main interest is resource extraction, such as

lumbering and mining or hydroelectric development.

Parks, protected areas, protected landscapes, cultural landscapes, and working landscapes are terms that describe a range of places with lesser or greater amounts of human intervention. The term used in any particular case generally relates to the reasons for which the place is “set aside” and how it is used. All of these places have intangible values ascribed to them by both local and nonlocal people and groups—beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Clashes of values can occur between the intangible values of different cultural groups or between different interest groups—they simply reflect the different values these groups place on the protected area in question. There are various ways of dealing with these differences. Often, in the Canadian situation, protected area planners work for government (federal, provincial, or territorial) and are expected to reflect broad societal values in the regimes established. For example, national parks are set aside “to protect for all time representative natural areas of Canadian significance in a system of national parks, and to encourage public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of this natural heritage so as to leave it unimpaired for future generations” (Parks Canada 2001a).

“Most lands have some kind of interest or commitment for uses such as oil and gas development, mining, hydro-electricity, forestry, agriculture and private recreation. Land-use conflicts and jurisdictional issues will have to be resolved in cooperation with the provinces, territories, Aboriginal peoples, and all interested parties including local residents” (Parks Canada

2001b).

Park management plans have to deal with the conflicting values of all such interested parties. Since the mid-1980s in Canada, with a renewed federal government policy on the settling of comprehensive land claims with Aboriginal peoples, management regimes for national parks have evolved considerably. Pressure from Aboriginal peoples for recognition of their cultural, natural, and economic interests in protected areas has meant that the objectives for protected area creation have broadened to include cultural and intangible values, as well as natural values. In some parts of Canada (in the North in particular), limited land entitlements combined with the opportunity for involvement in cooperative protected area management regimes have led some Aboriginal groups to view the establishment of protected areas in a positive light. In such cases, the creation of protected areas provides an expanded area of influence and traditional use for Aboriginal peoples. Of the forty-one national parks and reserves in Canada, more than one-third have advisory boards of some sort, with significant Aboriginal, and in some cases local non-Aboriginal, representation.

However, there are also examples where the concept of a protected area is an alien one to cultural groups who have a holistic view of the landscape and who have difficulty in setting part of the landscape aside and treating it differently from other areas. In a national system of protected area management, a monolithic approach to the management of protected areas will make it difficult to incorporate intangible values into management practices. In fact, the question has been asked, “By creating guidelines and giving

certain areas an international designation, are we adding to the homogenization of landscapes and cultures?" (IUCN 1999: 41).

Values-Based Management/ Knowledge-Based Management

Values-based management has recently become a popular term, particularly in the field of the conservation of cultural heritage. Here, in theory, the evaluation of a protected area or of a cultural resource will help determine the nature of its value, which will in turn be used to determine how it should be managed and what about it should be protected and respected.

Knowledge-based management is a term frequently used to describe a scientifically based management regime. While the values- and knowledge-based management concepts are not identical, neither are they contradictory or mutually exclusive. A merging of these two concepts might go a long way toward dealing appropriately with intangible values from different cultural perspectives.

If we wish to manage protected areas in a way that respects and sustains intangible values, we must do it collaboratively and be conscious of our thought processes and our cultural biases. In addition, often the way to elicit traditional knowledge or values is not at brainstorming sessions in meeting rooms or through scientific analysis. The landscape is the book in which the values are written, and being on and in the land is far more likely to elicit intangible values through experience, reminiscence, and storytelling. How to capture these values in such a way that respects their intangible nature but still allows them to be analyzed and understood and transmitted into management prac-

tices is the challenge. In many cases, the recording of place names and the associated stories can lead toward determining what management regimes or actions would be appropriate. This is because the stories often carry implicit or explicit advice on how people should behave toward the land, the animals, plants, and each other. The landscape is alive with meaning, and to be able to read it and understand it, people must interact with it. Place name studies and oral history projects are an excellent way to begin to articulate the intangible values of a local Aboriginal community related to a protected area, as well as to begin to understand at least one perspective on how the landscape has evolved to become what it is today.

Sustainability is a concept useful in defining objectives for protected area management. We can speak of the sustainability of values, the sustainability of landscape(s), and the sustainability of management practices. One way to examine management practices is to try to determine what needs to be done to ensure the sustainability of intangible values. We should not underestimate the challenge implied by trying to understand change and evolution when it comes to dealing with protected areas and intangible values. We all know that landscapes evolve over time, as do ecosystems and cultural systems. We are beginning to approach an understanding of how landscapes and ecosystems have become what they are today, but our view is limited with regard to understanding how much and what kind of change is desirable or acceptable for the future. In other words, what are the limits of acceptable change? We will need to determine measures of health or sustainability and establish

regular monitoring programs to determine the effects of our management practices.

Conclusion

To sum up, these are some principles to follow to establish management regimes for protected landscapes that deal with intangible values:

- The determination of values and the resulting management decisions must be participatory and involve local people in a significant way.
- A thorough recording of community knowledge, oral histories, and place names is a good way to articulate intangible values.
- A cookie cutter approach cannot be used. Management decisions must flow from an understanding of all of the values of the protected landscape, both tangible and intangible.
- Values that appear to be in conflict must be carefully examined and reconstructed to determine whether there is really a conflict and, if so, exactly what it is.
- Once values are clearly articulated and the appropriate management actions are determined, ways of measuring success and change must be identified and adopted. Monitoring and follow-up are

essential to achieving sustainable protected landscapes.

- It is important to define a moving scale of limits of acceptable change to reflect natural and cultural evolution and changing values.

The management of nonmaterial or intangible values presents many challenges. It requires park agencies to recognize previous, and continuing, associations between people and parks that have been generated through community and family history, personal aspirations, and diverse ways of perceiving the meaning or significance of landscapes.

Much has been said of the need to manage parks not as islands in a sea of development but as part of a patchwork of land tenures and uses (e.g., Nix 1997). Managing and understanding nonmaterial values involves a similar philosophy. The “core” aims of park creation and “nature” conservation must be set within a social and cultural context, and this requires us to understand the dynamic interactions between people and place that are embedded in the very fabric of protected areas. Conservation itself needs to be understood as a culturally defined activity, one that is open to biases that reflect the distribution of power within human societies.

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