

\*\*\*\*\*DRAFT for discussion\*\*\*\*\* August 1, 2008

## **Place-based planning, public participation and social assessment in natural resource planning and decision-making**

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### Introduction

Place-based planning has been used to refer to land and natural resource management efforts to connect diverse human values, uses, experiences, and activities to specific geographic locations. Although most planning efforts focus on specific places through land use zoning frameworks, the place-based planning activities being implemented today are different from other approaches. For example, whereas land use zoning segregates dominant uses from one another on the landscape, place-based planning takes a more holistic approach, focusing on identifying not only current uses but also values and meanings held by those who use and care about the place being studied. In addition, place-based approaches tend to take a longitudinal perspective, exploring desired future conditions for the landscape. This approach enables participants to identify a variety of uses that might occur concurrently rather than designating one primary use for the upcoming 10 to 20 years.

To achieve these ends land managers are using a variety of processes, activities, and forums to identify and spatially depict how people value and use landscapes. While there are many innovative approaches, however, there is little consistency and application is uneven with little verification or replication of approaches. In addition little has been done in the way of summary and synthesis or critique of these approaches (Farnum and Kruger 2008). Often the purpose is vague and the relationship between research, planning, public involvement and social assessment is often unclear.

In this chapter we review some examples of place-based planning approaches. We then explore the purpose, objectives and role of these processes and what was accomplished and attempt to unravel the relationship between these activities, public participation and social assessment through a secondary analysis of four case studies. We suggest that under-funded agencies are often attempting to accomplish multiple objectives with new, relatively untested techniques. We see an opportunity to incorporate research as a component of these activities. While the efforts are ambitious and creative often data quality and usefulness are questionable, and frequently results are not used. Finally, we suggest additional research that could be accomplished—in partnership with land managers—to provide better rationale and guidance for use of place methods, for critical evaluation of applications, and standardization of methods.

Why experimentation with new approaches?

Traditional planning and decision frameworks often focus on market-based social values and discounted and disregarded symbolic and emotional values and meanings held by people who care about places. Often only those things that you could count counted. Ensuing controversies often stymied plan implementation and divided communities. Many in management positions now recognize that the values and meanings people ascribe to places, the emotions, experiences, benefits and satisfaction people derive from activities that take place in particular places need to carry weight in decisionmaking. Managers are becoming more sensitive to this need and to the desire of those who care about places to play an active role in decisions about their management.

Petrich (1984:67) suggested that the most important aspect of the “specialness” of places is a holistic character that involves past experience and social and cultural meanings identified with the place such that the place “elicits an appreciation and attachment beyond the observable features of the landscape.” Thus, to know or understand place requires us to look at place from a perspective that encompasses and can illuminate meaning and action. Meanings are expressed through enactment and engagement which are social activities. Rather than as a static location, setting, or landscape, in order to access meanings we must conceive of place as a cultural system, much in the same way Geertz (1973) conceived of religion as a cultural system. Conceiving of place in this way may provide an opportunity to integrate multiple perspectives, grounded in lived experience, into a whole that better represents the real world (Kruger 1996).

Planning in itself is a place-making process

Participatory place-based planning processes incorporate people and place relationships, processes, experiences, and everyday first hand knowledge from lived experience. These planning processes, by their nature are democratizing. Place-based planning has been described as “... an effort to create a more equitable, democratic way of defining, expressing, and valuing places” (Cheng, Kruger, and Daniels 2003). Place-based processes may lead to more constructive dialogue by paying attention to both shared and contested meanings. “Knowledge of places having high value to humans as well as an understanding of the significant meanings and images that places have to individuals . . . should allow planners, managers, and decisionmakers to [develop management guidelines] that will maintain the salient characteristics of those places” (Galliano and Loeffler 1999).

It has been suggested that place-based planning is an opportunity to: build and empower community, engage the community in inventory activities, build relationships and trust, engage in mutual learning, explain policies and rationale, surface and mitigate conflict, plan holistically, and incorporate meanings into planning (Kruger 2008). However, there is little research that demonstrates how successful these innovative processes are at achieving these goals.

Public participation, social assessment and place-based planning

The primary ways that social science information enters in planning and decision processes of natural resource agencies is through social assessment and public

involvement (Endter Wada et al. 1998). But these activities actually represent a myriad of planning and participatory processes and data collection needs, which are context and issue dependent (Blahna and Yonts Shepard 1989, Bryan 1996, Burdge, 2003). One of the great utilities of place-based planning is that it can meet some of the data and process needs of both public involvement and social assessment. But, these two activities have distinct, if overlapping, process and data requirements; it is critical that those purposes are understood and considered in the place-based planning activities (Endter Wada et al. 1998). In practice, however, the distinction is often hazy or ignored, or the activities of public involvement and social assessment are kept separate, so the use of resulting data is unnecessarily limited.

For resource agencies, then, it is critical that the role and purpose of place-based planning is clearly identified related to public involvement or social assessment goals, and the data collection and processes used need to address these goals. Research needs to develop and test methods that serve the individual and overlapping purposes of social assessment and public involvement. This paper will review several case studies and compare the data collection processes, data, and outputs related to social assessment and public involvement purposes and processes.

### Social assessment

Social assessment is a tool to identify current social conditions and enable analysis of how people will affect and be affected by a proposed project or change. Social assessment entails the systematic collection, organization and analysis of social data to inform natural resource decision-making (Lane, Dale, and Taylor 2001). The social assessment process involves identification of all affected stakeholders, analysis of social conditions, prioritization of social issues and establishment of an appropriate process to represent the interests of stakeholders (Reitberger-McCracken and Narayan 1998, Bryan 1996). Inclusion of a social assessment process assures that projects are informed by relevant social issues and context and that a wide spectrum of interests is incorporated. A social assessment will explore demographic features, socioeconomic variables, social organization, sociopolitical context, needs and values, and institutions (Reitberger-McCracken and Narayan 1998, Bryan 1996, Burdge 2003).

Social assessment can be carried out by an individual scientist or a team using multiple research methods tailored to the systematic and representative sampling needs of each context. This may be accomplished through stakeholder workshops or field visits, and may be accomplished using participatory action research or other collaborative tools. With a focus on learning, social interaction, and opportunities to identify and work through problems, public engagement in social assessment can *contribute* to both broader understanding and more effective decision-making and implementation of decisions (Krannich et al. 1994). However, these methods more typically represent the goals of democratic, participatory methods of public involvement. Social assessment requires clearly illustrating that participatory methods meet the systematic, representative sampling needs of social assessment.

### Public involvement and citizen participation

Public involvement was originally mandated by the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946 as a requirement for public disclosure and feedback related to federal agency plans or management decisions. In recent years, the purpose of public involvement has grown dramatically to include interactive and participatory methods of public involvement, and even collaborative approaches where decision-making is shared among agencies and public stakeholders (Walker and Daniels 1996, Beierle 1999, Burroughs 1999).

But the primary purpose of public involvement and more open collaborative citizen participation processes remains the same; to democratize decision-making by directly engaging members of the public in decision-making processes. Goals include affording all affected parties an opportunity to learn about a proposed activity, pose questions and exchange ideas with others in order to produce better plans having a higher likelihood of implementation. A variety of methods are available from which to choose an approach best suited for a particular situation. While social assessment and public participation may both use participatory methods, the public disclosure/feedback purpose of public involvement is distinctly different from social assessment requirement for more systematic and representative data.

Participatory processes enable citizens to contribute to decisions about environmental issues and natural resource management that affect their own interests. Unfortunately, studies show that in public resource management, forums for participation are not being provided as often as they could be (Krannich et al. 1994; Kusel and Fortmann 1990; Shannon 1991a,b). Therefore, applied studies are needed to help identify specific opportunities, appropriate circumstances, and useful methods for increasing levels of citizen engagement. Literature and research on civic engagement, civic science, and social learning form a solid foundation from which to begin such an effort.

The interface of public participation, social assessment and place-based planning

Due to the plethora of methods and processes now being used for both social assessment and public involvement, the lines between these two activities have become blurred in both practice and research (Blahna and Yonts Shepard 1989, Endter Wada et al. 1998). While some data can be used for both activities, the basic purpose and process needs are distinctly different. In general, data resulting from public involvement activities can supplement social assessment data but not replace them, and vice versa.

Both process and data requirements need to be clearly identified for the specific purpose and context of the planning or decision-making activity in which place-based planning is being used (Endter Wada et al. 1998). If the data are meant to serve a social assessment function, the data need to be collected systematically and, to the extent possible, represent all affected stakeholders. If the data are primarily used for public involvement purposes, then group process and participatory methods are critical process activities, but the data are unlikely to represent all interests, and multiple methods must be used. In practice, however, these goals and resulting data limitations are often confused or not clearly articulated. When both functions are the goal, planning processes need to clearly

distinguish how and where the representativeness goal of social assessment and the democratizing goals of public involvement are being met.

If place-based planning is being used to meet both assessment and involvement goals, the integration of the processes used for collecting the data is critical. Planners and public involvement specialists need to be working together in designing the methods used to collect place data. This integration of purpose and method needs to be done in the early stages of the planning or decision making process. Too often, agencies implement methods social assessment and public involvement methods separate from each other, and without clear purpose that can help planners design appropriate methods (Endter Wada et al. 1998).

### Case study analysis

Research is needed to help provide a framework and methods for identifying which process and data needs are being met in place-based planning. The specific criteria we will use to evaluate four place-based case studies are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Case study evaluation criteria (DRAFT)

|                           | <b>PROCESS</b>  | <b>DATA</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| <b>SOCIAL ASSESSMENT</b>  | <p>Systematic stakeholder identification, description</p> <p>Multiple approaches tailored to different stakeholders</p> <p>Systematic, representative sampling included</p> <p>Relevant data scale and mapping comparable to other data types</p> | <p>Purpose clearly identified</p> <p>Represents all affected interests</p> <p>Multiple, overlapping place meanings identified by landscape</p> <p>Analysis of all interests by decision or plan alternative</p> <p>Strengths and weaknesses identified</p> |
| <b>PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT</b> | <p>Key interests identified, included</p> <p>Multiple methods based on interactive, participatory methods</p>   | <p>Purpose, use, scale clearly identified</p> <p>Represents key stakeholder groups</p> <p>Data relevant to specific project issues and context</p>   |
| <b>BOTH</b>               | <p>Both process sets above clearly identified and linked to purpose</p> <p>Meet both sets of criteria above</p> <p>Processes strengths, weaknesses for both SA and PI identified</p>  | <p>Data types clearly linked to both SA and PI purpose, issues</p> <p>Meet both sets of criteria above</p> <p>Data strengths, weaknesses for both SA and PI identified</p>   |

Summary of examples/ highlights from Farnum and Kruger 2008.....

This section will provide examples and an overview of the place-based planning activities documented by Farnum and Kruger (2008). The purposes and objectives of the activities and challenges met by planning teams will be discussed as they related to planning goals and meeting public involvement and social assessment goals/criteria. Methods, data quality, relevance and usefulness will be assessed.

#### Discussion and Research needs

The case study review results will be discussed in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed cases to meet planning, public involvement, and social assessment needs. It will be difficult to generalize from the small set of cases, so this section will focus on general research needs related to place based planning, and the use of place based planning results in decision-making. Some examples include:

Tools, processes, frameworks for accessing, assessing, inventorying and monitoring meanings, validating their use, and incorporating meanings into planning and management processes at a variety of scales are needed. Also, summaries, syntheses, and critiques of processes and approaches being implemented on the ground are needed. Rationale for use of place-based methods, critical-evaluative methods and validity research, and standardized methods are needed.

A framework for integrating place-based approaches, public involvement and social assessment is needed.

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