**A place’s past guides a healthier future**

We may explore in what ways the future of a place would be more sustainable if threads inherited from the past were drawn into the design of change. If that were done, it would enable the cultural meanings that the place’s character, fabric and patterns embody to endure. We may also consider how enabling such continuity in fabric, character and meaning matters in terms of the ways that the people who live, work or relax within such a place, or who value it from a distance, either thrive or do otherwise. Would they have more satisfying, life-affirming and enjoyable experiences in a place whose past more actively informed its present and future – in the sense that decisions were clearly being taken that rested upon respect for the place’s inherited qualities? Such experiences could be better for individual and communal well-being, and thus also better for health, in so far as that is affected by a place’s ‘affordances’, its properties that ‘are both objectively real and psychologically significant’ (Thompson 2013, 26).

A place may be defined as ‘any part of the historic environment, of any scale, that has a distinctive identity perceived by people’ (English Heritage 2008, 72), and heritage values may be most understandably dragooned under those four (below) that are set out in *Conservation Principles*, which were themselves derived in large part from the ones presented in the Burra Charter (*ibid*; Australia ICOMOS 1999). They may be regarded as universal, quite comprehensively encapsulating how any society, group or individual anywhere might go about the process of evaluation of a place. In England they are expected to be used ‘to prompt [usually in the context of careful consideration of the effects of a proposed change, i.e. in an impact assessment] comprehensive thought about the range of inter-related values that may be attached to a place’ (English Heritage 2008, 27). It is expected that all values will be strengthened by knowledge about the place (ibid), and they are often brought into sharper focus, made more coherent and more effectively expressed, when there are plans for changes that will affect that place.

**Evidential value** comes from the potential of the place to yield evidence (often chronological and functional) that will increase people’s understanding of the past, whether limited to the place itself or more generally. **Historical value**, on the other hand, derives from how people in the present can make connections with past people, events or aspects of life via the place through the processes of illustration and association, both of which increase the experiential pleasure gained from a place. That is heightened further through the **Aesthetic value** of a place, which is drawn from how people are stimulated sensually or intellectually by what they see or experience in it, whether what they enjoy was carefully designed or not the product of careful artifice. Finally, **Communal value** develops from the meanings of a place for those people who relate to it through either collective experience or memory, and perhaps comes closest to addressing the ‘affordances’ mentioned above, including the symbolic, social and commemorative aspects of relationships with place (English Heritage 2008, 27-32).

Historic England, the arm’s length government body that champions and protects the historic environment in its part of the UK has for some time recognised the benefits for personal and societal well-being that derive from careful curation of place. In 2000, as English Heritage, it published an influential discussion document entitled *Power of Place* in recognition of the influence of place, or the historic environment, on senses of identity, belonging and purpose, each of which contributes substantially to the well-being of individuals and communities. Conservation Principles and the concept of constructive conservation that has been developed from them are extensions of the accepted need to find ways of managing the historic environment in such ways that support economic and social needs at the same time as nurturing the relationships that people have with place (English Heritage 2013).

Impact assessments make extensive use of mapping, which spatially represents places, changes that may affect them, and mitigation or avoidance strategies designed to counter negative aspects of those changes. But they do not always make full use of spatial representations of current understanding of the origins and meanings of historic places, or the whole historic landscape, that which lies beyond and around and contains the familiar ‘historic assets’ (usually buildings, monuments or sites), whether those are designated for their significance or not. Landscape has been defined in the European Landscape Convention as ‘an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors’ (Council of Europe 2000). As such, all landscape is historic, the whole of Canada or Montreal, or the whole of a quarter, street or building within those, or any part of any other country. All is always humanised, whether physically altered or not, and so all places contain meaning and by extension value, all of which can be appreciated through one or more of the four ways of valuing introduced above.

In England current understanding of the historical basis of landscape is most systematically presented in the Historic England-led programme of ‘historic landscape characterisation’ (HLC), in which historic maps and aerial photographs and current historical understanding are the principal sources used to describe, interpret and categorise the attributes that make an area landscape, mostly those derived from past change. HLC or methods closely allied to it, have been used elsewhere in the word, including the Historic Landuse Assessment that covers the whole of Scotland and the HLCs that have been prepared in Wales, Ireland, mainland Europe and the USA (Herring 2012, 494).

HLC can be used in established procedures of impact assessment where HLC polygons can be considered in the same way that heritage assets like buildings and monuments are, being assessed and scored according to the scale of the proposal’s predicted impacts (e.g. Highways Agency 2007). In wider planning processes, HLC can form a spatial framework for assessment of sensitivity to change that follows the broad principles of impact assessment, but may be applied to development control or more strategic planning, the latter sometimes being beyond the formal planning process.

Assessment of sensitivity (or its close cousins, capacity and opportunity) starts from the appreciation that landscape and places do not have an ‘overall’ or inherent vulnerability or sensitivity to all types of change (discussed in Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2002). In a three stage process the still-developing Historic England method first considers all the ways a form of change, a scenario, might affect a place. In stage 2, it assesses the vulnerability and capability of a place (whether it be a specific HLC area or a generic HLC type) by considering how the scenario’s effects would impact upon the systematically recorded attributes upon which the characterisation was based. Finally, in stage 3, it considers how much the vulnerability or capability that is established in stage 2 matters to society by assessing how significant, or how highly valued are those aspects of the place (area or type) that are vulnerable to the change. The four Conservation Principles ways of valuing (above) may be used in such modelling of significance.

Such sensitivity assessment may be presented in a narrative form or via scoring, whether numerical, or through well-established impact assessment grading terminology (such as large, moderate or slight adverse effects). Care needs to be (and is) taken to ensure that decisions are not mechanistically read off from scores or grades, which are used rather as prompts to more thoughtful consideration in areas that score especially high or low in terms of sensitivity.

Sensitivity modelling may be undertaken for a particular place (such as a plot proposed for change) or may be applied more generically to an area or region, enabling more strategic decisions to be framed by those responsible for planning change. Generic scenarios might include the direct and indirect effects of climate change and other environmental change, but more often involve change planned for economic, social and infrastructural reasons by states or their agencies, or by businesses. Sensitivity of places or types of place may also be modelled for other scenarios such as neglect, or even for carrying on with long-established ways of using a place (as an alternative to changes that some might regard as more beneficial).

As sensitivity is scenario dependent (rather than inherent), its modelling for HLC types scored vulnerabilities and significances (or values) differently in relation to two forms of renewable energy – wind and solar farms – in Cornwall, in SW Britain. Scores were fed into the HLC’s GIS and displayed in order to inform more strategic thinking on what parts of Cornwall might be more or less appropriate for the location of further installations of each type of development (Cornwall Council 2010a; 2010b).

As the assessment of significance included ‘amenity and community value’, to some extent a proxy for Conservation Principles’ Communal value (see above), this approach included some weighting for attributes that contribute to affordances and thus individual and community health. As the importance of landscape for maintaining health becomes better understood it may be expected that the weighting of such attributes might be increased in future similar exercises.

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