What kind of landscape do we want? past, present and future perspectives

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What Kind of Landscape Do We Want? Past, Present and Future Perspectives

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ABSTRACT *Throughout much of the 20th century the public have played only a minor role in the determination of the scope and pattern of landscape change. In the earlier part of the century, professionals and arbiters of taste viewed the public as being incapable of appreciating rural or urban landscape aesthetics. For that powerful élite the rural landscape was seen as possessing indefinable 'spiritual' qualities which demanded protection from undesirable urban influences. While the productivity of the countryside was largely ignored in the years of abundant supplies of cheap overseas food before World War II, the mythical idyll of the rural landscape with its allegedly timeless values and its sense of social order was defended by the professional élites who claimed substantial cultural authority. These viewpoints are documented and then it is considered how the democratization and reconceptualization of landscape have influenced lay landscape aesthetics, attitudes and policy. Drawing on recent evidence from the Welsh LANDMAP initiative, today's public is concerned with many of the issues which engaged the attention of the élite three generations ago. Although the discourse might be the same, its contestation is radically different, being set within a new agenda of inclusivity and involvement. The public today care passionately about their local landscapes and resent the current scale and pace of change, homogenizing development and destroying sense of place. If the wider agenda of sustainability is effectively to be addressed, it is crucial that those in authority engage more proactively with the public regarding landscape planning matters as the historical and contemporary top-down models need more sensitive realignment and synergy with deliberative and inclusionary approaches.*

KEY WORDS: Landscape, history, public perception, focus groups

Introduction

Shifting values and perceptions of landscape have played, and continue to play, a critical role in shaping and defining rural Britain. The psychology of seeing and attaching value and meaning to a given landscape influences where people choose to live, determines how and where they work, and informs their sense of well-being and their sense of place (Appleton, 1996; Countryside Commission, 1993). Perceptions can also invoke powerful reactions and emotions about certain landscapes, features or developments. Consequently, the visual appearance and perception of our surroundings are both important and dynamic (Scott, 2002a). Landscapes are valued

for their character, features and patterns, and people tend to have an inbuilt resistance to changes in the visual appearance of familiar or local landscapes (Gourlay & Slee, 1998; House & Fordham, 1997). Gold and Burgess (1982) reveal how attachment to ordinary places and landscapes only emerges when they are actually under threat. Indeed, familiarity with landscape has long been an important factor identified in perception studies by Burgess *et al.* (1988) and Penning-Rowsell (1982). As Tapsell (1995) acknowledges, the most valued open areas are often the familiar ones which play, or used to play, a part in people's daily lives.

This is particularly evident in attitudes towards the countryside in England and Wales where, over time, the myth of a rural idyll has become an integral part of the psyche. This construction has been applied by individuals and organizations with passion and commitment to protect both individual and societal aspects of countryside traditions and practices, arguably to the detriment of the countryside itself (Cherry, 1976; Curry, 1993; Newby, 1985).

Drawing upon both historical and contemporary narratives, this paper documents the increased democratization of landscape planning throughout the 20th century, starting with the inter-war period, a time of undoubted and rapid social change in rural areas, when the aesthetics of landscape were essentially the preserve of the landowning and educated élites (Matless, 1998, p. 74; Moore-Colyer, 1999a). Despite the steady growth of interest in environmental and amenity issues, rapid suburbanization and growth in transport infrastructure, the landscape was not democratized in any substantive way until the landmark Skeffington report in 1969, with the formalization of public participation in the planning process in subsequent town and country planning legislation. The second part of this paper uses novel evidence emerging from the LANDMAP initiative in Wales, via a series of public perception studies, to see how far this post-productivist agenda of citizen involvement and participation is changing the kind of landscape that is wanted and/ or being delivered. The ensuing discussion considers the extent to which élite discourses represent popular attitudes and whether wider public involvement in landscape matters represents a new form of governance that will change the way experts and landscape professionals operate.

Earlier Perspectives on Landscape

By the late 18th century the rural landscape of England and Wales, as represented in painting, poetry, letters and philosophy, had become a symbolic touchstone of social value. The representation of the poor in the landscapes of Gainsborough, Moreland and others, and the poetry of Goldsmith, Gray and Clare touched upon political, social and economic themes, yet most rustic landscape painting and much of the literary canon presented an illusory but powerful and enduring account both of landscape and rural life (Barrell, 1972). Even if the Picturesque Movement (at its peak in the 1790s) contrasted the paternalistic Tory landscape of an older England with the oligarchic Whig concoctions of Brown and Repton, it was nevertheless backward looking, celebrating a pre-industrial way of life; a sort of elegiac background for a labouring class dispossessed by the Industrial Revolution (Bermingham, 1987, p. 37). The landscapes of the Sublime and the Picturesque offered a view of the world at odds with both industry and the political and social conditions within which industry had

been enabled to flourish (Bicknell, 1981; Everett, 1994; Hayes, 1980; Wiener, 1981). This moralistic and allegorical critique was to find expression in the later paintings of Constable, and be represented in Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* (1824–32; Mitford, 1865) or Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1852; Gaskell, 1972). Despite the abundant evidence in Quarter Sessions Order Books, estate records, Poor Law documents and a variety of literary sources which identified the reality of country life as being overshadowed by injustice, hardship, tedium and malice, if not starvation itself, the predominantly middle-class Victorian patrons of art saw the landscape as a repository of ideals, where an organic society worked harmoniously together in an ordered landscape within the framework of a clear social differentiation (Barrell, 1972; Holderness & Turner, 1991; Snell, 1985; Wood, 1997). This mythical and illusory notion of a pre-industrial pastoral idyll divorced from urbanism continued to grow and eventually found expression in the later 19th-century intellectual fascination with folklore and anthropology, which ultimately led to the 'revival' of folk music and dancing. But for all the efforts of publicists and practitioners, the academicized, historicist revival failed to capture the imagination (Moore-Colyer, 2001). On the face of it the intellectual élite had failed. Yet, as scores of railway posters, hundreds of chocolate-box covers and thousands of picture postcards triumphantly proclaimed, the myth of a 'pretty' countryside persisted and was to remain crucial to the perception of the landscape of Britain in the early and mid 20th century (Brace, 1999).

This perception of a rural idyll was also to find expression within the urban working population. By the turn of the century most of the millions who worked in the factories and mines were separated by some four to five generations from their ancestors who had cultivated the farmlands of England and Wales. Even so, as J.B. Priestley and others hinted, there remained memories of the countryside and farmscape of the so-called 'real' England where people increasingly sought the rural environment as a locus of recreation and leisure (Priestley, 1935). Increasing spending power among both blue- and white-collar workers, coupled with the growth of bodies like the Holiday Fellowship, the Co-operative Holidays Association, the Youth Hostels Association and the Camping Club of Great Britain drew larger numbers to the countryside, provoking commentators such as Joad (1946) and Clough Williams Ellis (1937, p. 180) to issue stern warnings as to their undesirable behaviour in the rural idyll. Access to the countryside was an elementary requirement of social justice and as the urban to rural population ratio advanced from 50:50 in 1851 to 80:20 in 1921, people came increasingly to seek escape from the urban environment (Savile, 1957). For the first time, the working people of urban Britain were returning to the rural landscape of their roots.

For decades novelists, poets, journalists and others were to deplore the grim state of many towns and the bleakness of urban life created by what J.B. Priestley described as "... The shoddy, greedy, profit-grabbing, joint-stock company industrial systems we had allowed to dominate us" (1935, p. 28). Among the more sophisticated of middle-class townsmen, especially those who saw around them tangible evidence of Britain's relative economic decline and increasing social divisiveness, there developed (as a generation previously) a nostalgia for a rural past (Mandler, 1997). Hence the extraordinary popularity of the writings of H.J. Massingham with their evocation of nature, of the peasant and the yeoman, of the parish church, of the

Tudor/Elizabethan house, of an older English landscape untouched by the banality of modernist cultural forces.[1] The natural state of things also became increasingly compelling in the distracted and uncertain world of inter-war Britain. Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson and, later, Henry Williamson, emphasized that order was the essential state of nature and that natural man, treated and educated properly, was essentially benevolent; thus, the closer to nature, the better the man, a theme subsequently taken up by Henry Williamson (Bramwell, 1989). Hence the growing interest in trekking, orientation and observation, which encouraged people to become attuned to the natural environment. By so doing they would engage with a fundamental spiritual resource essential to 'Englishness' (Matless, 1998, p. 74). Geographers like Vaughan Cornish passionately believed that the teaching of geography in schools was fundamentally essential to inculcating the aesthetic appreciation of the landscape (Cornish, 1946, p. 38). On the other hand, the trenchant and forthright farming polemicist A.G. Street had his doubts as to whether any but the 'few' would ever appreciate the real national value of the 'goodly heritage' (Street, 1937). Concurrently A.W. Ashby, the influential agricultural economist and rural anthropologist, added a jarring note and claimed that only city dwellers and the rural professional classes "... have anything approaching aesthetic appreciation of beauty in scenery" (Ashby, 1942, unpaginated), thereby implying that real country workers had too much to do to contemplate the aesthetic. He went on, emphasizing the class aspect of the landscape issue:

> Already many local authorities include members of a less cultured sort who have suffered real or imaginary slights, and are ready therefore to adopt an antagonistic attitude whenever any question of aesthetics crops up. To them beauty is an impractical quality treasured only by snobs. (Ashby, 1942, unpaginated)

Those Tory politicians, planners, geographers, writers and other cognoscenti who had fostered the image of a rustic myth cast in a Trollopian/Hardyesque mould believed the landscape to be coming under serious threat in the decades after World War I (Matless, 1991; Moore-Colyer, 1999a). As the tentacles of unplanned ribbon development stretched insidiously into the countryside accompanied by a mushrooming of jerry-built bungalows, shacks and converted railway carriages masquerading as weekend retreats, widespread dismay emanated from common rooms, urban dining rooms and the salons of the rural well-heeled. Meanwhile, cherished notions of rural serenity and tranquillity began to evaporate as the road system was upgraded with the inevitable accompaniment of 'unlovely' petrol stations, 'architecturally pretentious' tea houses, AA shelters, phone boxes and advertisement hoardings, each sufficient in itself to raise the collective blood pressure of those bent on the protection of the rural landscape (Moore-Colyer, 1999a). Against the background of an overwhelming urban and materialist culture and a high degree of official indifference, protection of the countryside depended, in essence, on the committed efforts of enthusiasts—various bodies ranging from the Women's Institute through the Royal Institute of British Architects to the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, founded as early as the 1860s (Miller, 1995; Sheail, 1981, p. 74). However, it was the Councils for

the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and Wales (CPRW), founded respectively in 1926 and 1928 on the initiative of the planner Patrick Abercrombie, which eventually came to co-ordinate the various protectionist efforts. For all their admirable intentions the councils were élitist bodies whose membership essentially comprised urban professionals and country gentlefolk, and even as their protectionist views diffused to a wider suburban audience, there emerged a perception that the CPRE were concerned, first and foremost, with preserving the countryside for those who lived in it. The Ramblers' Association, in particular, viewed both the CPRE and CPRW as reactionary and conservative and quite incapable of appreciating that a 'wide and harmonious' development of the countryside as a whole would not clash unduly with rural interests (Ramblers' Association, 1935). To those many ordinary people whose spiritual health the CPRE believed would be enhanced by enjoyment of the countryside, the organization was conceived as an obscurantist body which defined an aesthetic born of an élite country house society. Nevertheless, as Ashby (1942) noted, it was the responsibility of this élite to guide both the reading and visiting public towards a true appreciation of the countryside.

Abercrombie, Cornish and other preservationists developed an aesthetic rhetoric in which planners were seen as authoritative composers of landscape. Like the landscapes of the great estate, these would be 'moral' landscapes, devoid of offensiveness and vulgarity and replete with dignity, composure and civilized values (Matless, 1998, p. 74). Although not himself a planner, the ecologist, geneticist and rural thinker R.G. Stapledon had a profound influence on the 'official' approach to landscape in the immediate pre- and post-war years. Stapledon shared with other ruralist thinkers the conviction that the real creative and imaginative qualities could only be harnessed through close association with the land, an association which gave birth to independence, self-sufficiency and concern for the longer term (Moore-Colyer, 1999b). For Stapledon the rural community lay at the very roots of the economic and cultural *mores* of Britishness, and the *physical* improvement of the land to the benefit of all was a moral and aesthetic necessity. In considering the revitalization of rural Britain between the wars, he reflected upon the totality of the landscape and conceived a vision of almost poetic grandeur, embracing nothing less than the total social, economic, agricultural and aesthetic restoration of the hills and uplands of Britain as a means of rejuvenating the landscape and preserving its cultural uniqueness. Unlike the National Trust, which he believed to be unduly concerned with the 'fossilization' of natural beauty, Stapledon urged landscape conservation within a dynamic physical and social environment (Stapledon, 1935). Much of Stapledon's thinking about the landscape was conditioned by his lengthy spell in Wales, where he served as first Director of the Welsh Plant Breeding Station subsequent to its founding in 1919. In common with many of those involved in the early phases of Welsh nationalism, he believed that the land and those working on it were the ultimate locus of reality. His colleague, Moses Gruffudd, himself a major figure in the Nationalist movement, was of the view that the cause might best be served by the re-creation of a 'peasant' society with its roots deeply embedded in the social and cultural humus of the countryside. While this perspective was shared by a variety of English ruralist commentators, it became a central plank of Welsh Nationalist policy in the later 1920s. In a number of works the geographer and

cultural historian Pyrs Gruffudd has highlighted this issue and has discussed the complex linkages between landscape, culture, nationhood and nation building (Gruffudd, 1994, 1995, 1999a,b).

With the completion, in 1933, of Sir Dudley Stamp's magisterial Land Utilization Survey, discussion was prompted in both official and lay circles of the need to enshrine rural development within an underlying framework of planning. This was given further impetus by the publication of the Scott Report, which in turn provided a context for the Town and Country Planning and Agriculture Acts of 1947 and, importantly, The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. Regardless of Stapledon's reservations, the national parks, with their emphasis on preservationist elements, set almost exclusively within upland environments, were a clear and unequivocal statement of the cultural authority of the preservationist/ protectionist élite (Gold & Burgess, 1982). In the modern, rational, planned world of post-war Britain (represented par excellence by the 1951 Festival of Britain), the concept of the national park where agricultural and forestry activities were rigidly controlled and where the public were carefully siphoned between places of interest was the exemplar of the planner's dream. The parks had about them a satisfying sense of order appealing to the urban-based planning élite. But others offered a different perspective. In 1955, W.G. Hoskins published his celebrated *The Making of the English Landscape* (Hoskins, 1955). Now rather outdated, Hoskins's book was, and in subsequent editions continued to be, profoundly influential in moulding readers' views of the countryside. Hoskins saw the world of the trunk road, the by-pass and the dreary council estate and despaired of the planners' vision; a vision born of an urban (and to him, alien) standpoint. Shocked at what he regarded as the daily desecration of the countryside, he turned away to the past, finding consolation in a vernacular landscape rather than that forged and nurtured by the planning élite (Matless, 1993). Hoskins' views echo much of the inter-war ruralist discourse which encompassed the defence of the idyllic and of the old order. In this respect it could be seen as indicative of the declining industrial spirit of England and the tenacious clinging of a rural (as opposed to urban/planner) élite to the past and a mythical golden age (Jeans, 1990). Hoskins continues to be widely read, while the perennial success of the radio 'soap' *The Archers*, wherein the symbols of 'olde England' have endured and discomforting social and political changes have until recently been blithely ignored, suggests a continued craving for the golden age (Laing, 1992).

Contemporary Public Perceptions of Landscape

The previous section highlighted how traditional landscape planning and policy emphasized 'high culture', focusing on high quality landscapes and agriculture for protection. This was perhaps more understandable in an era when both the political and economic power of the landed interest remained of major significance despite the depression of the inter-war years. Throughout this period the importance of everyday local landscapes and what the public in general wanted from the landscapes they lived and worked in was neglected in both planning and policy terms. However, in the current post-productivist era these matters take on an increasing importance as the countryside is being actively

supported through the taxpayer; in effect, the majority of the adult population. As the range of agri-environmental schemes and landscape initiatives continues to expand, it seems only reasonable that the public paymasters should be given opportunities to articulate their views as to both short- and longer-term change in the countryside.

Such views have now found voice and acceptance within a new rhetoric promoting inclusivity, empowerment and local differentiation, strongly associated with the advent of Local Agenda 21 plans and Community Planning (Edwards, 1998; Welsh Assembly Government, 2001, 2004). This 'bottom-up' approach has been characterized by a plethora of responses and initiatives aimed at improving local landscapes and quality of life (Clifford & King, 1993; Crouch & Matless, 1996; Francis & Henderson, 1992; Greeves, 1987; Greeves & Taylor, 1987; Owen, 2002). Currently the policy emphasis has switched to community plans as the principal mechanisms to deliver a bottom-up approach towards the local implementation of the sustainable development agenda (Welsh Assembly Government, 2001, 2004). Furthermore, the European Landscapes Convention provides the justification for a more citizen-led approach to landscape matters, together with a more holistic view of landscape itself, where landscape is deemed to be democratic, participatory, inclusive, realistic and international (Phillips, 2004). Significantly, there is an interesting discourse echoing sentiments encountered in the inter-war period that challenged such notions, arguing for a professionally led élitist approach, where those trained in design were best able to express judgements on landscape in order to interpret the values of society in a consistent manner (Jacques, 1980; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982, chapter 4; Nicholls & Schlater, 1993; University of Manchester, Landscape Evaluation Research Project, 1976; Sanoff, 1991). This view reflects the technical rationality model as opposed to the more deliberative and inclusionary model where negotiated knowledge via enhanced public discourse is seen as providing a more satisfactory decision-making process (Owens *et al.*, 2004). Such views are evident in the literature reflecting the importance of involving the public in the process, as it is ultimately them who have to experience and live with the landscapes in question (Kent, 1993; Penning-Rowsell, 1982; Seddon, 1986). Furthermore, expert-led approaches can readily bypass local knowledge of places and circumstances and risk producing outcomes that are incompetent, irrelevant or unworkable (Roberts, 1998). Consequently, there is a growing, if seemingly reluctant, recognition among decision makers and affected parties addressing landscape problems that traditional top-down strategies are insufficient. Owens *et al.* (2004) provide an interesting contribution to this discourse by rejecting the alleged polarization as problematic and suggesting that research should focus on combining elements of both approaches within a learning and deliberative process.

The key questions therefore centre on how and when to ensure effective and efficient engagement with the public, allowing for all 'publics' to have a voice, and the extent to which such voices should inform or shape various policy options and decisions (Scott & Bullen, 2004). Such problems have produced a variety of methodological approaches from pioneering quantitative methodologies in the on-site work of Penning-Rowsell (1974) and Shafer and Brush (1977), to more recent internet- and scenario-based studies (Brabyn, 1996; Kingston *et al.*, 2000; Tress &

Tress, 2000; Wherrett, 2000; Yorkshire Dales National Park, 1992). Qualitative research has also demonstrated its complementarity and adaptability to such developments (Burgess, 1996). Here, as Hall *et al.* (2004) document in their review of economic methods and tools, there are new and exciting ways to tackle the complexities and vagaries of public preference agendas.

LANDMAP is a new landscape initiative within Wales that provides an innovative mechanism for classifying and evaluating landscapes in a Welsh context. Significantly, it differs from the landscape character initiative in England and Scotland due to its evaluation focus and, in particular, its inclusion of public perception as an integral component (Scott, 2003). Public perception studies undertaken within LANDMAP provide novel data for critically examining lay landscape aesthetics across Wales and their accordance with current policy initiatives. In the following paragraphs evidence from studies undertaken in Cardiff (Bullen *et al.*, 1998a), the Vale of Glamorgan (Bullen *et al.*, 1998b), Denbighshire (Scott, 1999), Wrexham (Scott, 2002a) and Merthyr Tydfil (Scott & Bullen, 2001) is used to illuminate the extent and focus of the democratization of landscape planning.

Within LANDMAP, the public perception layer is derived from a multi-layered assessment of landscape in which experts identify, describe and evaluate various layers of information which together form composite character areas (Scott, 2002b; Figure 1). Three representative photographs are then selected by aspect specialists to accurately reflect the diversity, range and features of these landscapes which then inform the public perception layer. A full critique of this approach is set out in Scott (2002a).
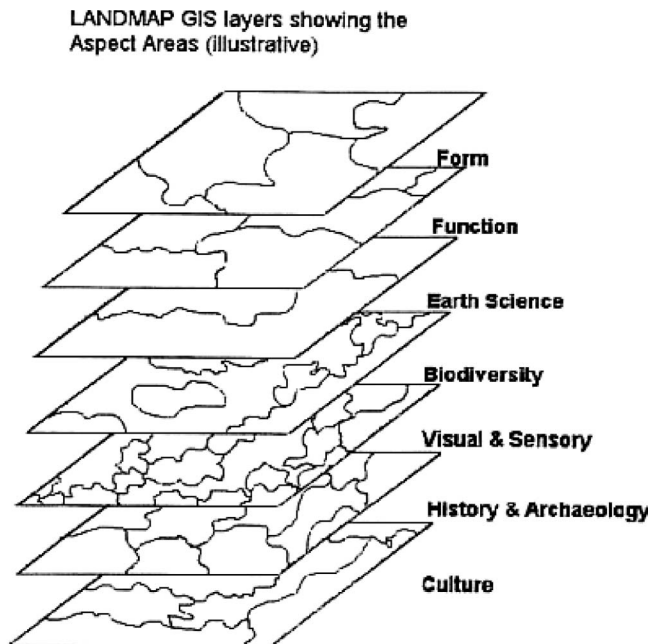

Figure 1. LANDMAP and public perception. *Source:* Scott & Bullen (2004).

Methodologically the approach to public perception in the present studies involved the simultaneous use of focus groups and household questionnaires as recommended by Burgess (1999).[2] Question areas pertaining to each of the selected 'landscapes' were included in both the household questionnaires and focus groups and aimed to establish tastes (with justification) in landscape, and the relative priorities for landscape conservation, enhancement and change.

The household questionnaire was based on a random clustered sample of 100 respondents, making use of Office of National Statistics all-Wales ward data which identified distinctive economic and social groupings, thereby improving sample representativeness (Scott, 2002b). The focus groups, meanwhile, captured the responses from a range of stakeholders who were normally excluded or significantly under-represented in traditional survey exercises: primary school children, youth, unemployed, special needs, rural land users and visitors. Due to resource limitations each group was established at random using specific sample frames: list of primary schools (children); list of youth groups (youth); unemployed job clubs (unemployed) and local authority special needs centres (special needs). The rural land-use group was selected from the newly-established local access fora or similar countryside fora prior to 2001 and the visitors' groups were selected at random from filtering surveys at a tourism centre or attraction.

Clearly this methodological approach is not without its problems. The use of photographs as landscape surrogates is controversial and emphasizes the visual dynamic at the expense of other factors and indeed focuses responses within artificial boundaries as depicted by the photograph. The use of single focus groups within an area as indicative of particular stakeholders (e.g. youth and children) is equally problematic and brings in questions of representation and transferability. In particular, when large numbers of photographs are shown, the quality of information and debate can be seriously affected over time. The merits of the focus group approach, however, are that it allows meaningful insights into particular viewpoints through discussion and debate.

The policy makers' need for 'best value' and prompt outputs clearly demands some methodological sacrifices, but the combined use of questionnaires and focus groups helps identify trends and illuminate key landscape themes. This is significantly strengthened when, in the present paper, comparative studies are used to reinforce and deconstruct public perceptions.

Contemporary Attitudes to Landscape

This section gives a flavour of what the public liked, disliked, wanted to conserve and wanted to change in particular landscapes. Experiences across and within different public(s) have been used to highlight areas of consensus and contestation across both urban and rural landscapes, together with views about the current delivery of landscape policy. Table 1 summarizes the key themes which emerge and have been used to shape the following section.

The household surveys revealed that the key attractors were complex and biased towards perceptions of naturalness and functionality: natural beauty, diversity, complexity, seasonality, colours, animals (farmed and wildlife) and farming.

Table 1. Landscape themes

- Holistic appreciation of landscape
- Landscapes as multifunctional resources
- Sense of place
- Landscapes as 'natural' idyllic constructs
- Landscapes as areas of consensus and contestation
- Failure to engage with public
- Marginalization vs inclusion

Significantly, respondents saw the landscape in its entirety rather than dissecting it into particular features and elements, although traditional features such as stone walls and layered hedges were singled out for attention, as were trees and historic features.

The focus group responses illuminate such perceptions:

Variety is the essence, from a varied seashore, right up to different kinds of farming, into coal mining fringes. (Vale of Glamorgan)

You have the countryside, the city and the sea . . . its all here and so beautifully located. (Cardiff)

A mix of landscape, hedges; some managed and trimmed, others left to grow until layed. Different woodland features and a bit of bracken . . . its got the balance of managed and wilder areas. (Denbighshire)

The view and expanse gives appeal; it invites limited exploration. (Wrexham)

Functionality in the landscape was also evident with the strong support for modern agriculture, where the public positively assessed the landscape as a place for food production:

Yes, I love this landscape; its functional and beautiful and I can enjoy the changing seasons and character of the fields and livestock. (Vale of Glamorgan)

Our working landscape is important, it makes up the character of an area. (Cardiff)

Interestingly, exchanges within the various focus groups highlighted the importance of unforeseen factors. For example, countryside policy officers were surprised how influential colours were in generating positive landscape perceptions (Eagar, LANDMAP co-ordinator for Wales, pers. comm., 2001; Rees, Principal Countryside Officer, Denbighshire County Council, pers. comm., 2001):

The lovely red soil of the vale has a beauty all of its own. That red colour is different from elsewhere in Denbighshire. (Denbighshire)

> The different shades of green are beautiful; the colours are magnificent. (Vale of Glamorgan)

The public were also appreciative of history and culture in the landscape, reflecting a more sophisticated understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of landscape rather than the stereotyped visual responses claimed by some commentators (Jones, 2002).

> A lot of the buildings in Cardiff . . . are incredible . . . some of the carvings, some of the tile work . . . we tend not to look at them because we are so used to them. (Cardiff)

> There is so much history to enjoy, the lovely buildings, old cottages, farm-houses, the towns, castles and burial chambers. (Vale of Glamorgan)

One interesting aspect revolves around the perception of 'naturalness' encountered in the responses. It is clear that public perception does not accord with professional interpretations as the term has been used in varying circumstances with reference to heather moorland and intensively managed farmland. It is the authors' contention that such sentiments reflect a highly positive visual response to an 'idyllic'-type landscape rather than 'natural' in its strictest sense.

Landscape detractors were also clearly revealed in the household surveys. Here, modern urban and industrial developments, landscape dereliction, rubbish and pollution and discordant features such as fences, pylons and erosion were consistent themes across the counties. The focus group responses helped confirm this, as well as illuminating more general concerns about new landscape developments which 'homogenized' the landscape. Clearly there was a desire to preserve the 'sense of place' amidst quality developments:

> Cardiff is not distinctive, it's the same as everywhere else with rubbish, litter and housing estates, even industrial estates look exactly the same. (Cardiff)

> Shopping arcades are spoiling our city centre. All cities are becoming the same with the same stores in them, as if they were turned out by machine. Large stores cut out the small shopkeepers and destroy our rural communities. (Gwynedd)

> I know they have to build houses . . . (but) they could get the houses to blend in with the countryside . . . and paint them in natural colours. (Cardiff)

> Cheap and nasty, placeless, faceless. Where is the pride and craftsmanship in these developments? (Vale of Glamorgan)

However, within Cardiff some respondents valued the more sensitive aesthetic of some new developments:

> Most of the new developments in Cardiff are horrible; they are discordant with the historical character of the town and are plonked in a most unnatural

way. The Cardiff Bay development is a rare exception and testimony to what can be achieved with good planning. (Cardiff)

In terms of conservation priorities the household surveys reinforced this holistic appreciation of landscape. A macro view was evident, within which the 'whole' was seen to be greater than the sum of the landscape features and elements. Here issues to do with the scale, character and 'sense of place' were often encountered. The importance of farmland, culture and history was also stressed. Green space was particularly important in urban contexts.

The focus groups comments similarly reflected these priorities:

The whole countryside should be conserved, because we haven't got much of it left ... green fields and farmland—they are just building on it. (Cardiff)

Green land—should be protected from housing estates ... Small communities— they are being eroded and have no separate identities ... Future generations will miss what we had the pleasure of seeing, we want the future generations to enjoy the beautiful sights. (Vale of Glamorgan)

In Gwynedd it was the rural landscape/mountains and 'borrowed' landscapes of Snowdonia National Park that were most valued:

... developments are bound to happen, but the landscape should be treated with the respect it deserves, especially the wildlife and open space ... planners should exercise more control over development. (Gwynedd)

The quotations from the focus groups highlight the importance attached to 'place' and amenity space, whether it is the vast expanses of upland, the small intimate nature of a rural village, or the green spaces in a crowded and congested city. They also emphasize how people want to protect working and functional landscapes, confirming the importance attached to agricultural landscapes as resources to conserve.

The issue of changes required in the landscape reflected the previous concerns with the rapid pace and large-scale nature of modern developments. In addition pylons, fences and rubbish were often mentioned, as was the need to convert conifers to deciduous woodland. However, the most commonly encountered response was to 'keep things as they were'. The focus group responses confirmed such views but also revealed more subtle twists reinforcing this need for functional landscapes rather than just aesthetically pleasing ones. Typically youth and children often expressed antipathy towards a landscape because, although it was attractive, it served no obvious function for them:

It's all very well for people to enjoy beauty, but that's no bloody use for us we want somewhere to play; we haven't so we just hang around. They even complain about that. (Denbighshire)

Building more facilities for the people wouldn't be a problem, such as a leisure centre; somewhere to kick a football around or go biking. (Wrexham)

In Gwynedd too the link between high-quality landscape and tourism developments as a means to regenerate the local economy was emphasized:

> We need urban-related tourism developments, whilst I am in favour of conserving rural areas . . . we need jobs and money in order to enjoy our landscapes . . . We must not bite the hand that feeds us. (Gwynedd)

> I understand the need for villages in the Vale to develop but not at the scale that transforms the essential rural nature and feel. (Vale of Glamorgan)

Again the pace and scale of development in the Vale of Glamorgan was seen as "threatening the peaceful and tranquil landscape and the pattern of intimate villages and historic towns", whilst in Gwynedd it threatened the "very culture of Welsh life".

It is the authors' contention that such responses reveal the need for change, but the concern is over the way change is implemented, with all the concomitant economic, social and environmental impacts. Naturally there were simple representations of the 'not in my back yard' (NIMBY) view encountered, but significantly the results show a sophistication and understanding that supports the current theory of planning in Wales but not the current practice.

Responses encountered across all the counties directly challenge the rhetoric about community participation and involvement and question the way that policy and decisions are made and implemented. High levels of public cynicism towards consultation reinforce the feelings of marginalization and frustration observed throughout our research:

> It doesn't matter what we say the council will do what they want anyway. (Denbighshire)

> The Council doesn't listen to the views of local people. We need sensible and accountable planning procedures to address such issues. . . . There are flaws in the planning system—you feel nobody is listening to you . . . they ignore us and just carry on. (Vale of Glamorgan)

> It is down to the people in the end . . . they have to picket, protest etc. (Gwynedd)

A similar view was expressed by respondents from both ends of the age range. Retired people referred to 'protests' and 'petitions', whilst children talked about 'taking action', 'protesting' and organizing 'campaigns'. These points were also evident within more subtle contexts. The youth group from Merthyr Tydfil gave a fascinating insight into negative attitudes towards green space on the edge of a built-up area. Previous groups had valued this space for recreation and conservation, so the hostility and negativity encountered were both challenging and unexpected. Close inspection of the exchange below reveals alienation towards the playing fields as they represented a missed opportunity for a skateboard park. The current green space therefore signifies and reinforces the feelings of exclusion

and disillusionment for them as teenagers, ultimately leading to a loss of confidence with the council:

I don't like it.

Yeah, that's where our skateboard park was going to be; why did [the council] ignore us?

It's nice but they used to have a park there for the kids, but that's gone as well.

No one ever listens to us; they just moan when we have got nowhere to go and just hang around. I mean we could have had a skateboard park; that would keep us out of trouble.

The preponderance of such views, in the absence of any positive statements from all the respondents, presents convincing evidence of policy makers out of touch with their public.

Significantly, most of the public responses have shown an emerging consensus over landscape tastes and it is this finding that was perhaps the most surprising. This was particularly interesting with respect to the rural land-use (expert) focus group that was consistently both suspicious and sceptical of any research trying to elicit a 'public view' on what were essentially rural and farmed landscapes, an interesting tension that echoes some of the 1930s anxieties documented earlier. Much to their surprise, the focus groups and household questionnaires provided strong support for agriculture, both as an economic activity and as a contributor to the landscape:

Farming is very important here. This is a natural landscape. I think we are spoilt living in this area. (Denbighshire)

Yes, I love this landscape; it's functional and beautiful and I can enjoy the changing seasons and character of the fields and livestock. (Wrexham)

It's farmed and very beautiful; I like seeing the animals. (Denbighshire)

However, in some focus groups controversial issues emerged where agreement was impossible. The following discourse in Wrexham (agricultural lowland flood-plain landscape) highlights the polarized views between those that see a river as a threat to nearby villages and those who want to conserve such natural features:

Water features are always attractive features to me; we need to conserve rivers; let's not build on the flood plains in the first place.

That's right such areas are important for flora; that area could be an SSSI [Site of Special Scientific Interest] due to its geomorphology as well.

You conservationists are all the same; protect protect protect; well the people and the houses need protecting.

What you need to do is just build the banks higher and stop the flooding. There is a church there and a village. You cannot just let the water go. People need somewhere to live and they need protecting.

I am a farmer's son and this land is there to be used by people not stuck in a museum. (Wrexham)

Similarly, attitudes towards development in the countryside around the villages prompted the following exchange:

Dull.

Crowded.

Mismash.

Dreary.

Shame all that countryside is disappearing and that all buildings are going up. It is plonked so unnaturally there. No thought.

No I do not feel like that they are communities aren't they. They are in the country with access to the countryside. So they are not dreary.

They are using local materials to build the red brick houses.

Might need the factory to sustain the population.

No need having an idyllic community if there is no opportunity for them to work there. Need to strike a balance; same as using red brick as local materials.

Discussion

That political change has heralded contemporary notions of social and cultural inclusiveness does not detract from the fact that in approaches to landscape, as in many other aspects of life, the more things change, the more they appear to stay the same. A belief in the farmed landscape as the aesthetic focal point, a concern for regionalism, localism, distinctiveness, functionality and variety, and criticisms of developments which might spoil the 'character' of a village or area reflect a consensus over the type of landscapes that are wanted today as they were three generations ago.

Most ruralist writers of the inter-war period viewed the preservation of the 'ideal' of country life as a bulwark against social change and a vital counterbalance to the urban values and homogenization of culture which they perceived as an absolute threat to the fabric of society. Echoing earlier views of Ruskin, Morris and others,

they believed that the rural landscape needed to be confined in the past, a mythical idyll representative of an old, stable organic order. Genuine understanding of that landscape, they believed, was the prerogative of the few, and it was the task of those few, the élite planners and composers of the landscape, to guide the public towards its appreciation. This was the ultimate 'top-down' strategy, intolerant of change, indifferent to rural dynamics and largely ignoring wildlife and environmental issues. However, as Howard Newby observed, change was afoot in the sense that the 'occupational community' was slowly being displaced by a more diverse and cosmopolitan urban-based population who were systematically dismantling many of the foundations of traditional rural life (Newby, 1985). Increased social mobility and access to the countryside for growing numbers of people meant that in the longer term the hegemony of the 'expert' vision of the landscape would be brought into question. Stapledon's notion of a physically and socially dynamic landscape, the preserve of the many rather than the privileged few, would become a central plank of official policy by the late 20th century as it became increasingly clear that in the future the generation of tourist income would supersede the production of food as the primary function of the countryside.

The public perception studies reported above provide a number of interesting points of comparison and contrast with the past. Throughout the 1930s, when British agriculture had descended into profound depression and when politicians and public alike were largely indifferent to its fate, the farmed landscape was still perceived as the primary locus of the rural aesthetic. Its role in the economy may have been ignored, yet the essential values of a managed farmscape were seen to be important in a manner which verged on the metaphysical. In this context it is significant that contemporary public perception attaches great value to both the aesthetic and the functional attributes of the agricultural landscape, which is seen as dynamic and functional and yet still capable of conveying aesthetic pleasure. Indeed, it may not be stretching credulity too far to argue that farmed land today carries with it the same 'spiritual' values that were claimed for it by middle-class ruralists in the inter-war period. The landscape of the mixed farm, its hedges and fieldbanks intact, its 'traditional' buildings well maintained and its human occupants devoted increasingly to retaining the fabric of the natural and cultural environment, continues to remain a powerful icon. To this extent, at least, élite discourses of the past seem to remain a significant influence on landscape responses.

Not only did the public in Wales value the farmed landscape, they evinced deep appreciation of the cultural and historic landscape. Thus the psychological importance of historical continuity, sense of place and sense of belonging, remains of major importance. At a subconscious level, perhaps, a sense of the past is even more vital today in a society often dominated by the values of commerce, money, the immediate and the 'relevant'. This is particularly evident in the negative comments relating to landscapes or developments which had been 'homogenized' and where distinctiveness and craftsmanship had been lost. Yet the responses were sophisticated enough to recognize landscapes where past and present architecture complemented each other, such as in Cardiff Bay. Such attitudes mirror precisely a tradition of writing, whose origins lay with Ruskin and William Morris, which argued, and continues to argue, the case for local and regional variety and to propose the

view that the abandonment of individuality (as expressed in craftsmanship) can readily render people hostage to the machinery of the state. "Dull", "Crowded", "Mishmash", "Dreary", "... plonked so unnaturally there"; so responded focus group members to building developments around traditional villages. Here, once again, are the people, the non-experts, expressing their verdict on contemporary developments. But, *plus ça change*. In 1932 the tenant farmer and rural polemicist A.G. Street wrote of the paradox whereby urban slums were cleared only to be rebuilt in the countryside. Describing the ribbon expansion of a fictional village under the guidance of the local authority, Street castigated the 'planners' whose touchstone was cheapness and whose houses were "hideous rows of glaring slums of unlovely aspect and colour" (Street, 1932, pp. 307–308).

In general, respondents were dissatisfied with landscape changes that seemingly bore little resemblance to their desires or needs and indeed appeared to conflict with the thrust of much planning policy theory (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004). This led to significant disillusionment and alienation, a process much in evidence in the late 1920s and early 1930s throughout the debate over the proposed National Grid (Moore-Colyer, 1999a).

If the urban–rural divide has tended to evaporate against a background of social and cultural homogenization and mass exposure to popular culture, the public interviewed in these studies unquestionably felt excluded from discussions affecting their environment and hostile towards those who determine patterns of development. "No one ever listens to us" speaks volumes of the negative feelings towards those who impose environmental changes which do not comply with grass-roots opinion.

The suspicion and scepticism evident among some contemporary 'experts' regarding the validity of research on public attitudes towards landscapes is seriously questioned in this study. This is especially the case when one considers that the prevailing public views of landscape aesthetics and utility accord with much of the thrust of current thinking, advocating a more joined up and holistic treatment of landscape matters where people are at the centre (Phillips, 2004). Indeed, these findings have recently been reinforced in a much larger study looking at 'What Kind of Countryside Do We Want?' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004). The mismatch between the public view and the landscape reality suggests a failure of both process and product in landscape decision-making, raising wider questions of the adequacy of the democratization of landscape planning. Previous research helps illuminate this discrepancy, where issues to do with short-term economic development, politics and national interest appear to override local objections/opinions (Tewdwr-Jones & Phelps, 2000).

Such findings question whether the necessary infrastructure and culture is in place to accommodate the implications of this new rhetoric of citizen engagement. Indeed, similar conclusions were reached in the assessment of the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic in Wales (Scott *et al.*, 2004). Here the need for better communication and information set within a managed process was seen as a critical pre-requisite to locate effective engagement strategies. Moreover, there was clear evidence that agencies themselves were merely indulging in a tokenistic, ad hoc arrangement for public engagement which flies in the face of conventional academic wisdom (Richards *et al.*, 2004).

In the earlier 20th century, criticism of rural and urban landscape change and active antipathy towards development in various shapes and forms tended to be limited to the articulate middle classes and, more especially, to professional 'experts' among their number. Protest focused on jerry building, ribbon development, noise and rubbish pollution, the mushrooming of advertisement boardings alongside rural roads and the malign influence of the motor car associated with 'undesirable' urban values in the countryside. Urban ideas and outlooks, it was urged, would sound the death knell of 'elemental vision' among country people, while the craving of the poorer classes for weekend chalets would visit their lack of taste on the treasured landscape (Blunder, 1926, p. 47; Hussey, 1930). But such protests were ultimately to little avail. The growing array of suburban folk, who already enjoyed the countryside in miniature through their gardens, sought the freedom of rural England in their cars, while their brethren in the terraces and tenements followed suit. On the whole, however, the latter left little record of their views and although, by way of organizations like the Ramblers' Association, they articulated their opinions on the vexed matter of access, their perceptions of the aesthetics of the countryside remained unheard. Today, however, the situation has dramatically changed. Increased access to the rural landscape and advancing prosperity, coupled with educational changes which focus increasingly on environmental and sustainability perspectives, are bringing into the countryside a public which demands more of its amenities than was the case 70 years ago. As they require their towns to offer a broad range of facilities within the context of an acceptable aesthetic, so they require a multi-faceted landscape which combines functionality with amenity, culture with history and farming with environmental sensitivity. Fatalistic acceptance of an expert-driven aesthetic surely should be a thing of the past; yet significantly the landscape character initiative in England and Scotland explicitly rejects public perception for that very reason, whereas within Wales the LANDMAP initiative explicitly builds in and maps public perceptions (Scott, 2002a).

This paper has revealed a common concern for landscape across the temporal divide, while the most fundamental change over the time period under study has been the increased public involvement in landscape relative to an expert-driven aesthetic in the inter-war period. Given the discourse in the contemporary literature about the role and efficacy of public involvement, this paper challenges the established orthodoxy that only experts 'know best' and questions whether we have progressed into an era where the effectively articulated views of community members need to be taken into account. While the simple fact that people might hold a particular view is not in itself demonstrative of profound enthusiasm for direct involvement, the outcome of focus group studies suggests that different groupings would, at the very least, expect their views to be considered by those concerned with planning decisions. The lack of formalized feedback from such ventures is a key concern. Sophisticated and complex factors underlie the responses of individuals or groups to particular landscapes and many of these factors can be unravelled and demystified by the employment of multiple research strategies. Where these processes are used to assess public reaction to landscape without the immediacy of a particular development, important insights into perception may be gained. These rarely come to light in the adversarial and reactive environment where most public participation related to landscape occurs.

The success of village design statements shows how a 'bottom-up' approach can complement conventional policy planning, but it is clear that there remains considerable dissatisfaction with planning past and present. Indeed, the overload of current consultation processes concomitant with increasing public scepticism and hostility towards experts poses real challenges for the effective delivery of sustainable development. The homogenization of landscape and development and the pace and scale of change are all facets of a planning system seemingly as much out of touch with people today as with ruralist commentators in the past. This reinforces the need to develop a planning system more responsive to public preferences. However, participation exercises are notoriously expensive and time consuming for planning departments on limited budgets and there is a real risk of respondent fatigue given the plethora of survey exercises now being delivered. This presents a real conundrum; people care passionately about their landscapes and these studies have shown that marginalization leads to resentment and cynicism. The countryside is now going through a period of rapid change and uncertainty and it appears that we are still waiting for both the public and landscape professionals to decide upon what sort of countryside they indeed want. The temporal perspective offered in this paper has shown that in essence people's requirements have not significantly changed between the earlier 20th century and the present, although the process by which that agenda is established and driven has altered dramatically. Throughout the earlier period aesthetic judgements and articulate protest remained the preserve of an educated élite, and although evolving political activity has ushered in an era of social inclusivity, it seems to be the case that in many aspects of landscape planning the public feel alienated from the process. Put simply, there remains a yawning gulf between the rhetoric and reality of inclusivity. This apart, echoes of the past continue to resonate in the sense that people retain the feeling that urban values continue to be imposed upon the countryside. Although it is sometimes difficult to isolate this feeling from focus group studies, it is becoming increasingly pervasive. Letters to the press, editorial copy in 'country' magazines, the activities of the Countryside Movement; all carry about them more than a hint of concern that 'rural values' are under constant threat and in this context the notion of 'invasion' of rural areas remains implicit. Accordingly, if the rhetoric of inclusivity is to be upheld and the challenges of rural sustainability effectively to be addressed, there is a compelling need for the public to be more closely involved in decisions over landscape development within the framework of sensitivity towards the social, cultural and 'local' fabric of the countryside.

Notes

1 Distrustful of mechanization, reductionist science and the Victorian ideal of progress, Massingham demonized the capitalist Protestant spirit and the Whig liberal free-market system associated with it, which, he argued, gave rise to an exploitative attitude towards all natural resources. His view, expressed in many books throughout the 1930s and 1940s, compares interestingly with the contemporary view of the association between Western capitalism and environmental exploitation/destruction (Moore-Colyer, 2002).

2 It is clear that some studies use qualitative techniques in isolation. This view is not shared by the author, who views complementarity as a vital objective in public policy research.

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