

## Involving local communities in the recognition of what nature does for people

*Field visit to Lewes and Ouse Valley eco-nomics group, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014*

In June 2014, the Ecosystems Knowledge Network organised a field trip in partnership with the Lewes and Ouse Valley **eco-nomics** group (L&OVe). The aim was to explore ways of engaging local communities around the UK in recognising the value of ecosystem services.

### Introduction

Valuing nature's services and involving people are two important parts of an ecosystems approach. The challenge of putting these together at the local level (in towns, cities and rural communities) is only just beginning to be recognised. L&OVe, together with its *Chalking up the Benefits* project (part of the South Downs Nature Improvement Area), is developing tools to engage local people in a greater recognition of the value of nature. The goal is the improvement of people's wellbeing and building resilience in the local economy.



Participants on the *Naturegain* walk

The event was held in Lewes, East Sussex. It gave participants the chance to gain a deeper understanding of tools developed by LO&Ve and others. In the morning, three presentations covered examples of community engagement approaches and experiences. Participants also took part in a *Naturegain* walk, developed by L&OVe. In the afternoon there was a brief presentation covering the opportunities and challenges around the valuation of ecosystem services from a New Economics perspective. Each project (see below) then ran an interactive workshop where participants had the chance to test out the tools and consider how they might be used in their own field of work. The day ended in a plenary discussion.

1. **L&OVe valuing ecosystem services across Lewes:** The Lewes & Ouse Valley **eco-nomics** group (part of *Transition Town Lewes*) has been developing a range of tools to engage the local community in recognising the value of ecosystem services. Dr. John Parry (an associate of L&OVe) coined "*naturegain*" as a new word to help people understand 'what nature does for

us and how we can help'. The '*Naturegain Going Local*' workshop process is one such tool and *Naturegain* walks another. Both are experiential and participatory. By focussing on the very local surroundings (a 5 kilometre square) around the town, members of the Lewes community are able to recognise and feel part of the group's focal area and to see the interdependence of the town's community, economy and local environment. For more information, see <http://www.lewes-eco-nomics.org/about-love/>.

2. The **Holnicote Flood Demonstration Project**. This project worked with the National Trust to engage the farming community to recognise the value of working with natural processes to reduce downstream flood risk. This workshop explored the tools and key messages used to engage tenant farmers, such as 'kitchen table' discussions and the use of trusted intermediaries. Experiences of where engagement has not been so successful and some of the reasons underlying this. There was also a discussion of some of the financial considerations including actual monetary values of incentives used. For more information, see <http://ccmhub.net/case-studies/holnicote-case-studies/holnicote/>.

3. The **Talking About Our Place** toolkit. This was developed by Countryside and Scottish Natural Heritage. It encourages communities to get involved in the future of their landscape by helping them to explore what makes their place special, recognise the benefits they receive from the landscape, identify issues which may affect it and use this understanding to share decisions about how their place should be managed. It contains topic sheets which cover a range of subjects from dealing with conflict to



Identifying the ecosystem services provided by local habitats

conducting field surveys, information about the benefits derived from a variety of habitats and project template forms. For more information, see <http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/communities/talking-about-our-place/>.

The *Naturegain* walk around the Lewes Railway Land Project site covered a variety of habitats including woodland, reedbeds and wetland meadows. It lasted for around an hour. At a number of key 'stopping points' during this activity, people were encouraged to recognise and understand the benefits that they receive from the natural environment they are passing through. Walks were led by Colin Tingle (L&Ove) and Dan Fagan (Lewes District Council Ranger).

The presentation by Chris Williams from the New Economics Foundation cautioned that if monetary valuation is used, the benefits must be stressed as a means to an end, and that it is important to emphasise that social and environmental benefits are linked. Quantitative or qualitative valuation can help make the case for investment in healthy functioning ecosystems providing multiple benefits from a single site.

## Learning points

The following arose from discussions during the day.

- *Use tools for participative, experiential learning* as much as possible; this helps people engage and feel part of the issues and processes they are learning about.
- *Start with a general appreciation of nature.* People often identify cultural ecosystem services first and things that are personal to them, rather than other services that they can't see. Dog-walking and spiritual or aesthetic values are often mentioned first. People then progress onto health and economic benefits. If engagement starts with a general appreciation of nature, it can prompt people to think more deeply about the natural environment and the benefits they get from it.
- *Don't expect people to express values straight away.* In order for local communities to understand and value what local nature does for them, they may need time to appreciate the place in ways they haven't before. On any walk or outing, it can be effective to ask people to stop for three-five minutes, to close their eyes and concentrate on what they can detect with their other senses. This gives them a personal connection that forms a good starting point for exploring and valuing the wider set of things that nature does for them (ecosystem services).
- *Some services are recognised more than others.* More prompting is needed before people recognise ecosystem services that may be classed as regulating (such as flood control) and supporting services (such as pollination). Supporting services will very rarely be mentioned by people and therefore need to be explained.
- *Be cautious of economic frames for ecosystem services* - quantitative or qualitative valuation can help make the case for investment in healthy functioning ecosystems providing multiple benefits from a single site.
- *Talk in terms of appropriate, knowledge-based management* for enhancing both natural capital and biodiversity.
- *Maps are tools that help to engage people.* It can be helpful to let people draw on maps as this give them something to relate to. The visual and tactile elements of engagement tools, and the fact that participants are generating knowledge by creating maps, helps to give them a sense of ownership. It is also a suitable way to involve everyone. However it is important not to raise people's expectations to an unrealistic level about what they can achieve.



A map of the ecosystem service benefits and beneficiaries around Lewes

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- *Different tools and activities are appropriate for different communities and areas.* For example, getting communities to connect ecosystem services with specific locations may not work so well in much larger areas. When using maps, it may be necessary to use several maps showing specific towns and rural areas if a very large area is being considered.
- *Choose words and pictures carefully.* It is important to use language that is familiar and relevant to local people. Picture cards of services can help to speed up the engagement process. Various scenarios can be prepared in advance to enable participants to think about adaptation to change in the landscape (whether this be due to climate or new uses for land).
- *Expert facilitation is important.* When involving communities it is important that everyone feels valued and that they are an expert in their own situation. Input from external technical experts, or from people that may be perceived as holding positions of power or influence, need to be introduced and managed carefully. All involved should understand that engagement is a two-way process.

The Ecosystems Knowledge Network is grateful to Network Member Colin Tingle for his partnership in hosting and organising the event, along with all the other contributors.