

Place meanings as lived experience

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April, 2009

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Abstract

The ways that multiple interests come to be represented in park and natural resource management need improvement. The history of stakeholder dialogue that surrounds park and natural resource planning and policymaking is largely one of conflict and contestation. The theoretical perspective described in this chapter is a response to the contentious nature of park planning in which the divisiveness of political ideology is compounded by an exclusive reliance on traditional scientific knowledge. It is suggested here that the emotion that gives shape to place and political ideology may be productively included in planning dialogue through shared stories of lived experience. The theoretical lens crafted here is particularly useful when focused on individual stakeholders who represent themselves and their affiliate interest groups in the planning process. Through the sharing of emotional experiential knowledge, during pre-planning phases, these representative stakeholders have the capacity to refocus dialogue in ways that build upon shared memories and place meanings.

Introduction

The emotion that drives political participation and defines stakeholder's important places needs to find an avenue for productive integration into park and natural resource planning. How we experience the environment and how we remember it are emotional processes that define our important places and largely influences our preferred planning outcomes. Stakeholder representation in planning dialogue historically mutes emotional and imaginative place meanings in favor of ideological positioning supported by [techno] rational argument. While this sort of debate is valuable and necessary, it would be well served by foundational dialogue that addresses how stakeholders *feel* about the area of focus for planning efforts. From a lived experience perspective, this chapter discusses the role of memory and emotion in support of a theoretical platform for improving stakeholder representation in park and natural resource planning.

Political scientist Martin Nie (2003) describes most political arenas that focus on park and wild land management as being stilted by historically embattled ideologies. Driving and reinforcing this ideological embattlement are “wicked problems that characterize most public policy and planning issues” (Nie, 2003, p. 309). These wicked, or complex, problems are social controversies that lack technical solutions and are generally managed (not solved) in a process of political judgments, adaptive management regimes, and/or fragmented planning forums (Allen & Gould, 1986). Nie (2003) identifies a lack of effective communication and the crisis orientation among interest groups as roadblocks to expanding dialogue. As stakeholders continually draw upon their entrenched ideological moorings when entering into dialogue and negotiations a stalemate to progress is triggered by the inability of representation to move beyond simplistic, adversarial, and deeply ingrained rhetoric.

Issues of representation in democratic land management are often the product of an expert-public gap that can exacerbate historic ideological conflict. The expert-public gap is the result of two conditions: experts dismissing citizen views as less-informed, and the difficulty of the citizenry in finding a political foothold for their perspectives (Yankelovich, 1991, p. 4). The result of this trend is a diminishing capacity of the public to represent itself in expert-based decision-making forums. Put succinctly:

“It is sometimes difficult to believe that the public and policy-making experts in the U.S. share the same language and culture” (Yankelovich, 1991, p. 3).

Without access to representation in park planning, the potential for self-governance is eroded and stakeholders to the process become frustrated. This political landscape has defined American democratic process in land management and has served to alienate a concerned public.

As a result of ideological rifts compounded by the cultural codification of knowledge within a traditional scientific perspective (Bell, 1962, p. 25), emotionally volatile stakeholder engagement is common in park and natural resource management. In the book, *Wisdom of the Spotted Owl*, Yaffee (1994) refers to behavioral biases of human actors and organizations as contributing to a poor policymaking environment surrounding spotted owl habitat protection in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Tension and conflict were prevalent as emotions ran high in what was, and still is, an ideological battleground of iconic significance. Further, the conflict over habitat protection for the spotted owl continues to be defined by scientific debate that addresses policy mandates set forth in the Endangered Species Act. This theme of emotionally-fueled rhetoric centered on conflict and scientific expertise is recurrent. Be it emboldened protest of offshore drilling on the Pacific coast (Freudenburg & Gramling, 1994), local resident’s meltdowns over confined animal feeding operations in the Midwest (Johnsen, 2003), or cultural conflict over fishing rights on the Atlantic coast (Lynch, 1993) stakeholder’s engagement in

natural resource planning typically takes the form of conflict and crises with scientific expertise positioned as the ultimate form of representation.

While a great deal of warranted attention is given to technical issues in land-use decision-making, there are other forms of knowledge that are useful in their own right and context. The need for stakeholder dialogue to extend beyond historically strained rhetoric that grants superiority to a traditional scientific perspective is taken up here with a characteristic focus on the role of emotion. Emotion is at the center of place meaning and political activity. In recognizing the transformative power of emotion, it is suggested here that an increased focus on shared place meanings among politically active stakeholders can improve dialogue surrounding park and natural resource planning.

Stakeholders and democratic representation

American democracy in the second half of the twentieth century focused largely on ethical concerns that were, and still are, taken up by special interest groups. Issues surrounding land use planning are brought to bear politically through communication of organized interests. This type of identity politics in American democracy centers on negotiation, contestation, and representation of multiple perspectives (Benhabib, 1996). In the case of park and natural resource management, conservation-based ecological concerns are a clear example of a political movement within this type of identity politics. Political representation for these concerns is taken up by such groups as The Wilderness Society, American Wildlife Foundation, Sierra Club, and Earth First; each group with a unique identity and political ideology. Moreover, political representation is embodied in those individual representatives from special interest groups who are part of planning dialogue surrounding America's parks and natural resources. Often these individuals live in or around the areas of concern. This peculiar subset of individuals are

referred to here as localized representative stakeholders and are viewed as vital sources of experiential, emotional knowledge that is key to expanding dialogue surrounding park and natural resource planning.

Our democratic processes need to be equipped to make sense of the emotional energy that catalyzes politicized ideology and shapes place meaning. The basic theoretical underpinning of sense of place or place meaning, as referenced interchangeably here, is the notion that space becomes place as a result of an emotional transformation (Relph 1976, Tuan, 1972). To understand place meanings is to understand emotional transformations of physical space to human place. Like place meanings, political ideology is the result of emotional transformation (Lerner, 1947). As political scientist Daniel Bell points out:

“... What gives ideology its force is its passion. ... One might say, in fact that the most important, latent, function of ideology is to tap emotion. Other than religion (and war and nationalism), there have been few forms of channelizing emotional energy. ... Ideology fuses these energies and channels them into politics” (Bell, 1962, p. 400).

Ideology, catalyzed by emotion, takes a representative turn through human enactment. With strong feelings for the places of interest and how they should be managed, politically active stakeholders that have a personal history with the area are positioned at the emotional nexus of place and political ideology. These stakeholders have the capacity to enhance democratic representation in park and natural resource planning by sharing their experiential, emotional knowledge of place.

Localized representative stakeholders have two basic characteristics that make them an appropriate focus for efforts at incorporating emotional knowledge into planning and policymaking processes. First they have a clearly defined political ideology evidenced by their subscription to the mission of a larger organization. In addition, they typically have first hand

experiential knowledge of the area(s) at the center of planning and policymaking efforts. As members of organized interest groups, and as frequent visitors to the area of interest, individual stakeholders who are member-representatives of larger organized groups are seen as important and relevant participants in researching place meanings. As these representatives discuss their lived experiences in their important places the door is open for productive entrée of emotional knowledge in stakeholder dialogue.

Emotion

With emotions playing a crucial role in expanding stakeholder dialogue it is important to further conceptualize them so we may explore representational strategies that move beyond politically and scientifically simplified meanings of place. The sociology of emotion identified here as particularly relevant focuses on two modes of lived emotion: feelings of the lived experience, and feelings while telling about them (see Denzin, 1985, who referred to these as the “lived body” and “intentional value feelings,” respectively). These feelings immediately associate the individual with their environment in ways that are accessible to a broader audience. Denzin (1985) describes feelings of the lived experience and their ability to foster a shared understanding, as an:

...orientation to the interactional world of experience, they are accessible to others and they can furnish the foundations for socially shared feelings.....Others are able to vicariously share in the subject's feelings. ... The subject can communicate and 'give' these feelings to others, thereby allowing them to enter into a field of emotional experience with him. (p. 230).

These feelings give meaning to places and are told in stories of the lived experience. Further, these types of feelings are commonly understood, as we all have lived experiences. Feelings associated with the telling of lived experience, “are felt reflections, cognitive and emotional,

about feelings” (Denzin, 1985, p. 230). This second mode of emotions is the result of reflecting on our experiences and telling about them selectively according to a given political context and associated ideological framework. Framing emotion in this way provides an interpretive mechanism for understanding stakeholders emotions associated with their experiences and in the telling of those experiences.

Olstad (this volume) presents a working example of how the two modes of emotion may be encountered in written form. In this case the author invites the reader to feel the experience of being in the Red and Painted deserts. Through the use of first-person descriptive prose, Olstad invites the reader to ‘enter into a field of emotional experience with her’ (ex. feelings of the lived experience) while carrying an overarching reflection on, and implications for, the telling of those experiences (ex. feelings while telling about the lived experience). The author describes the feelings of the lived experience in ways that include, ‘quiet sunrises and sunsets glowing in her heart.’ In turn, Olstad reflects on her feelings in the telling of her lived experience by situating herself as a social theorist and concluding that there is a need for both scientifically based information and experiential knowledge.

To seek and interpret emotions as characterized by feelings of the lived experience and feelings while telling about the lived experience provides a means of interpreting stakeholders emotional place meanings in ways that concurrently build trust and understanding. By giving a basic form to emotional representation, this two pronged description of emotional engagement is one that does not seek causality and so it is a positive framework for building trust. This basic framework of emotion focuses on understanding *how* people feel about their important places and not *why* they feel that way. People are more likely to share freely if they can trust that they are not being personally scrutinized for how they feel about their important places. Trust and

understanding is further bolstered by drawing on stories of lived experience as a common source of knowledge. We all have lived experiences and so we have an empathetic charge toward that of others. We can understand how people feel and how they express themselves when they are talking about something with which we are familiar. By centering stakeholder dialogue on lived experience we increase the capacity for what environmental historian Keith Basso (1996) has described as ‘place making’. In describing the process of place making, Basso writes:

“... place-making is a way of constructing history itself, of inventing it, of fashioning novel versions of ‘what happened here.’ For every developed place-world manifests itself as a possible state of affairs, and whenever these constructions are accepted by other people as credible and convincing – or plausible and provocative, or arresting and intriguing – they enrich the common stock on which everyone can draw to muse on past events, interpret their significance, and imagine them anew.” (Basso, 1996 p. 6)

Place making - through shared stories of lived experience – presents an avenue for creating shared memories and appreciation for multiple stakeholder interests. An exemplary place-making forum is described by Stewart, Glover and Barkley (this volume). The authors describe how ‘learning circles’ – supported by photo-elicitation techniques – are a promising technique for accessing feelings of the lived experience and for understanding feelings while telling about them. By their account of the learning circle format, implemented in three different land use scenarios, the authors describe the creation of shared emotional space among stakeholders to park and natural resource planning that fostered empathy and shared understanding.

Place meanings shared among politically active stakeholders to park and natural resources management are a way that managers-as-stakeholders can come to understand the emotions that typically ride high in park and natural resource planning and policymaking. Further, without access to these types of place meanings managers retain a limited perspective on the importance of the area to its localized stakeholder constituency. In a technical report entitled

Understanding Concepts of Place in Recreation Research Management (L.E. Kruger, T.E. Hall & M.C. Stiefel eds., 2008), Stokowski (2008, pp. 31-60) describes a history of research and theory on place that points to place meanings as both emotional and constantly in flux. Accordingly, Stokowski extends Tuan's (1972) emotional transformation of space to place in necessitating the communicative precipitation of place. In championing the sharing of experiential knowledge in place-making processes Stokowski extends a charge to managers-as-stakeholders:

“A manager’s imperative then, should be to understand the emergent qualities of place-making and place meanings in order to respond to patterns of discourse shaped by structured communicators linked across social networks. In this effort managers should err on the side of variety rather than constraint in allowing resource settings to be as open as possible to social and cultural behaviors through which place meanings may be expressed.” (Stokowski, 2008, p. 54)

In this vein, place making exercises like Stewart, Glover and Barkley's (this volume) learning circles should be embraced and encouraged by park and natural resource managers.

The creation of shared place meanings is manifest in shared memories. As we tell stories of our experiences and what it's like to be in a place we are constructing memories and sharing them in some fashion. The relationship between memory and the lived experience is at the center of knowledge production in coming to understand people's important places. To understand how stakeholders important places are represented through the sharing of experiential knowledge, the term lived experience needs to be defined and the subsequent role of memory and processes of remembering need further articulation.

Remembering the lived experience

As the subject of investigation into emotion, lived experience requires definition so that the subsequent implications for memory and place making are made explicit. Lived experience refers to a series of temporal, spatial organizations that in its most basic form involves our immediate consciousness of life prior to reflection (Dilthey, 1985; Sartre, 1957). Lived experience - so defined - exists only in its representation and does not exist outside of memory (Denzin, 1992). The only way we can come to know and understand our lived experience is through acts of remembering and sharing those memories.

The process of memory construction is imaginative and emotional (Denzin, 2001) as the act of remembering is something that happens in the present but is referencing an absent past (Huysen, 2003). Recollection is not merely reduplicative, but socially influenced (Bartlett, 1932/1967; Durkheim, 1924/1974; Halbwachs, 1941/1992). We engage in memory-making processes in which the people and places of our experiences shape our memories and our stories. Condensation, elaboration and invention are common characteristics of ordinary remembering (Bartlett, 1932, p. 205). Further, the ways that we streamline our memories and stories are constantly in flux. It is through social interaction (Schwartz, 1989) that place meanings – derived from memories of the lived experience - are represented to a broader audience.

Memory is an active process, and not something that is passively received by the individual. We choose to remember and account for our experiences according to our individual relationship with social processes. Anthropologist James Wertsch (2001) describes the functional relationship between the individual and society using ‘mediated action’ (Wertsch, 1998; Vygotsky, 1987) as a theoretical foundation. The theoretical framework of mediated action holds that the cultural tools made available to the individual by society mediate all human

action. While cultural tools are made available by society, they are actively consumed and usually transformed through use patterns introduced by the individual (Wertsch, 1998). We are not simply bystanders whose memories are bestowed upon us by socio-cultural forces beyond our command.

We choose what we remember and how we represent those memories. The ways we choose to remember and retell our stories is a social and emotional process. The individual sentiment is transformed in association with the collective sentiment (Durkheim, 1924). Like individual sentiment, individual memory is constructed within a group perspective (i.e., the collective) while the collective memory is realized through the memory of the individual (Halbwachs, 1941). In this sense the group can't express itself separately from its individuals (Bartlett, 1967). This suggests that the individual memory is constructed by the individual based on the influence of the collective memory, and in turn, contributes to the collective memory of the group to which the individual belongs. Understood as such, the construction of memory is an ongoing process of reception and appropriation (Bartlett, 1932; Halbwachs, 1941; Wertsch, 1998) through which individuals serve to represent collective, or group sentiment.

With a focus on value-theory, Schroeder (this volume) provides an alternative framing of the relationship of lived experience and memory described here. With 'felt value' underlying both 'held' and 'assigned' values, the process of value determination is one of experiencing and feeling (i.e., felt values) that is made explicit in the form of 'held' or 'assigned' values. Schroeder further describes a relationship whereby the formation of abstract 'held' and 'assigned' values can transform the foundational 'felt values.' In this cyclical framework of value determination, the lived experience is remembered and accounted for according to a

developing framework of [explicit] ‘held’ and ‘assigned’ values that are both informed by, and serve to inform, [implicit] ‘felt values.’

Historian John Bodnar discusses this process in terms of ‘public memory’ (Bodnar, 1992). Public memory is something that is continually created while at the same time drawn upon, to bring the past, present, and future together in ways that are relevant. Bodnar writes:

“Public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present.... Its function is to mediate the competing restatements of reality these antinomies express. Because it takes the form of an ideological system with special language, beliefs, symbols, and stories, people can use it as a cognitive device to mediate competing interpretations and privilege some explanations over others.” (Bodnar, 1992, pp. 14)

This description of public memory speaks to the poignancy of the concept while alluding to major limitations in strategically garnering collective remembrance. While bringing stakeholders together to share stories of their lived experience can refocus dialogue from a traditional scientific perspective and offers a way of mediating multiple perspectives, the concept of public memory sheds light on two primary limitations of the theoretical approach described here. First, as a strategy of deliverance from ideologically entrenched dialogue, [re]creating public memory is problematic in that public memory itself takes the form of ideology. While it may be thought of as a newly-shared ideology and a way to ‘channelize emotional energy’ (Bell, 1962, p. 400), public memory is nonetheless ideological and is vulnerable to becoming yet another layer of entrenchment in an already adversarial political arena. Perhaps more serious than the ideological implication of public memory is the privilege afforded to its [re]creators. In the case posited here, where localized representative stakeholders serve in the construction of public memory, the privilege of determining memorable and meaningful aspects of place is

enjoyed by a select group. For public memory to serve as a foundational concept in promoting a more informed and productive planning dialogue these limitations need to be addressed.

An important first step in addressing the above limitations is to properly locate the resultant knowledge of place and memory making processes within the broader scope of planning. The type of knowledge described here - garnered through place making processes and the creation of public memory - is most aptly addressed during pre-planning phases. Stewart, Glover, & Barkley (this volume) are quick to point out that this type of knowledge and learning is most appropriate as a precursor to formal planning. This important caveat appropriately situates [imaginative and emotional] experiential knowledge as a means of improving planning *dialogue*; not as a direct referent for the types of decision making scenarios taken up by formal planning procedures. The privilege that is afforded to those that take part in selective place making processes is further addressed through the characteristic focus on localized representative stakeholders. These individuals are appropriate for these types of pre-planning efforts according to their capacity for experiential knowledge (i.e., as frequent visitors to relevant sites) and ability to represent special interests (i.e., as member-representatives of larger affiliate interest groups) within an identity politic.

In addressing the limitation of public memory as a form of ideology, the primary concern is to avoid having shared meaning relegated to overly-simplistic points of debate. To address this limitation is to keep tabs on public memory and facilitate opportunities for further [re]creation. While public memory is a form of ideology, repeated place making forums are a way to provide aeration so that these shared memories and meanings do not become static ideological representations prone to inappropriate application to park and natural resource planning processes.

Conclusion

Place, political ideology, and the emotion enmeshed in both are identifiable through sharing stories of lived experience. Told through stories of lived experience, place meanings present a promising communicative concept in seeking the productive inclusion of emotional knowledge in park and natural resource planning. Creating memories and places by sharing stories of lived experience is a way to address a history of stagnant dialogue in natural resource planning that is consistently relegated to historically embattled stakeholder ideologies. This scenario is compounded by the exclusiveness of expert-based planning that prefers the technorationality of traditional science. A lived experience perspective offers an alternative form of representation that has the capacity to build shared place meanings, memories, and visions for the future.

Lived experience, as a philosophical orientation toward knowledge and knowing reality, holds central the idea that through the actual experience of something its essence may be felt and understood as reality (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). As a series of temporal, spatial organizations that in its most basic form involves our immediate consciousness of life prior to reflection (Dilthey, 1985; Sartre, 1957), it is through our memories and stories of the lived experience that the places of our experience are imbued with meaning. When the management areas of interest serve as a setting through which the individual has passed previously, memories and stories of their experience provide insight into what those important places mean. When these stories are shared among stakeholders in place making processes - as exemplified by 'learning circles' (Stewart, Glover, & Barkley, this volume) – it is a form of social learning by which emotional knowledge may be addressed to the advantage of stakeholder dialogue by creating shared memories and place meanings.

The power of a lived experience perspective is realized in a democracy defined by identity politics, where place meanings may serve to critically nuance communication among individuals speaking for their affiliate interest groups. Place making processes among localized representative stakeholders – undergirded by a lived experience perspective – are a way to build trust by facilitating the representation of emotion in seeking to understand what people are feeling; not why they feel that way. Localized representative stakeholders are individuals who live in the region and stand in at local and/or regional meetings to carry the message of organized interest groups. Sitting at the crossroads of place meaning and political ideology, these stakeholders should be afforded an opportunity to share their experiential knowledge of the area. This is in keeping with the imperative of a manager-as-stakeholder to, “understand the emergent qualities of place-making and place meanings in order to respond to patterns of discourse shaped by structured communicators linked across social networks” (Stokowski, 2008, p. 54). By sharing these stories, a public memory may be forged that can present new possibilities for future planning efforts by creating shared place meanings that focus on the emotional source that drives stakeholder engagement.

Born of a hopeful vision for land-use decision-making processes in America’s public parks and other natural resource areas, place making is conceptualized here as an avenue by which agreement may be reached, or perhaps conflict more fully understood among political actors. Discussing lived experience and creating public memories is a way to ‘enrich the common stock’ (Basso, 1996, p.6) among representative stakeholders while keeping tabs on emotional place meanings that, along with our memories, change over time. As these representatives discuss their lived experiences in their important places the door is open for important emotional knowledge to further become a part of public memory. In other words,

place making among stakeholders can [re]shape a public memory that frames emotional knowledge - that which catalyzes political ideology and defines sense of place – as a source of shared meaning and not of a priori conflict. This public memory, resulting from place making activity as a precursor to formal planning, can expand stakeholder dialogue through the productive inclusion of emotional knowledge by sharing and understanding place meanings from a lived experience perspective.

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