

# Exploration of Community Members' Plural Values: A Case Study of Woodland Creation in Waterside Hill

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## **Summary**

The study investigates community members' values and meanings and their complex interplay in the case of a woodland creation project in Waterside Hill located next to St. John's Town of Dalry in South Scotland. The values and meanings of community members are complemented by the views of a representative of Scottish Forestry and a former employee of the landowner who were involved in the woodland creation project. The case is contextualized within the broader efforts to combat climate change through afforestation, often sparking green-on-green debates where environmental interests and arguments on opposite sides conflict. The debate is explored in the context of Scotland, where objectives of woodland creation aim for both climate mitigation and economic growth.

The meanings and values are explored through a theoretical framework of plural values, including direct and indirect instrumental, intrinsic, and relational values. Instrumental values refer to values in nature as means to achieve a desired outcome, whereas intrinsic values view the value in nature itself. The two have long formed a dichotomy, and relational values have been the most recent addition, referring to the value of relationships and responsibilities between nature and humans. Additionally, the place-based meanings of relational values are specifically captured through the concept of sense of place (SOP). Relational values are emphasised in the study as the most recent additional concept. The framework enables to examine how these values are present and overlap, interact, and conflict in the context of woodland creation, through the case study of Waterside Hill. A research gap is identified in previous research on plural values in woodland creation projects comparable to the context of Scotland, as well as studies on the case of Waterside Hill. The study contributes to this gap by exploring community members' values and meanings and their better integration into the woodland creation projects.

The study uses qualitative research methods for data gathering and analysis. In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted: 11 with community members, one with a representative from Scottish Forestry, and one with a former landowner's employee. The participants from the community consisted of people with some kind of meaning or value to Waterside Hill and views of the woodland creation project. The data was analysed through stages of thematic analysis using inductive coding. Further, research ethics were considered throughout the thesis, including participants' free, prior, and informed consent for their participation in the study, guarantee of anonymity, storage of research data and sharing of the final study.

The study outlines the findings through the themes determined based on the theoretical framework of plural values. Direct instrumental values illustrate the objectives, interests and uses of the forestry sector and landowner through themes of financial benefits and job creation, climate targets, and the landowner's use of the land. Indirect instrumental values, on the other hand, reflect community members' meanings and values regarding the use of the hill through recreation and agriculture. Intrinsic values expressed by the community members highlight care and appreciation of biodiversity and ecology and concerns over

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negative impacts on the nature of Waterside Hill and the surrounding area. Further, relational values, most expressed by the community members, illustrate aspects of aesthetics, history, culture, attachment, uniqueness, and personal memories in which the place-based meanings explored through SOP are present.

The values and meanings expressed by the community members are varied in their degree and emphasis. Nonetheless, the majority of the community members discussed similar meanings, values, and views on Waterside Hill and the related woodland creation project, which are complemented by the views of the representative of Scottish Forestry and the former employee of the landowner. The key findings illustrate the dynamic presence and interaction of plural values in the woodland creation project on Waterside Hill. First, the woodland creation project is found to emphasise indirect instrumental values through the financial benefits gained from it through grants paid for the landowner and future timber production, as well as climate targets aimed at climate mitigation through efficient planting of Sitka spruce. Intrinsic values can be seen as visible in the project through environmental impact assessment; however, in terms of the instrumental-intrinsic dichotomy, the woodland creation clearly emphasises instrumental values.

Second, along the lines of instrumental-intrinsic dichotomy, community members' emphasis on direct instrumental values of recreation and agriculture can be seen to conflict with their emphasis on intrinsic values, like concerns over negative impacts on nature. Nonetheless, although contradictions are evident, for the majority of community members, the recreational and agricultural use of land was strongly connected to their intrinsic and relational valuation of nature. This finding highlights the overlapping, intersecting, and conflicting nature of plural values.

Third, the findings most prominently illustrate how relational values lack recognition, understanding, and integration in the woodland creation project. The variety of relational values and meanings expressed, from attachment to the nature and view of the Hill to cultural significance of an oral story and a related ancient piece on the Hill, to personal memories and historical meanings, were according to community experience left under the radar in the woodland creation project. The relational values and meanings are further emphasised through their place-based nature explored through SOP. These findings underscore the necessity of plural valuation values in woodland creation, including relational values.

Lastly, the findings highlight the intrinsic complexity of plural values and their recognition, understanding, and integration into woodland creation projects. Besides policies and regulations of woodland creation, the character of the plural values influences their recognition and integration. Instrumental values are generally tangible and negotiable. Intrinsic values are mandatory to consider, at least to a certain extent, through environmental regulation. Relational values, on the other hand, are often nontangible, personal, and hence non-negotiable. In addition plural values, overlaps, interactions and

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conflicts make their lines blurry. Such factors can hinder the recognition, understanding, and integration of plural values.

In conclusion, the study underscores the necessity for plural values to receive adequate recognition, understanding, and integration in woodland creation while acknowledging the immense complexity of such a task requiring fundamental changes in mindsets, policies, and regulations. Despite the valuable insights the study provides, it also acknowledges some limitations and emphasizes the need for future research. Approaches for future studies, such as quantitative survey studies and focus group discussions, are suggested as beneficial for exploring the broader and deeper scope of plural values and meanings. Further, potential tools for future research are also highlighted, including the IPBES conceptual framework of plural values and the Nature Futures Framework.