The Importance of Place: Advances in Science and Application

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ABSTRACT. The concept of place is introduced and an orientation to place literature is provided. Following the introduction, an overview is given of the papers in this special issue of *Forest Science*. The papers included in this issue were presented at the 2000 International Symposium on Society and Resource Management in Bellingham, Washington. FOR. SCI. 49(6):819-821.

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THE CONCEPTS OF sense of place, attachment to place, and place-based planning are appearing more frequently in academic literature, agency publications, and the popular press. Sense of place values are important components of the way people appreciate, enjoy, and value the environment (Ehrendfeld 1993, Norton and Hannon 1997). Academic and agency researchers and resource managers are using a variety of methods to explore the meanings, experiences, and actions that enable us to understand place and people's relation to their environments. These concepts are being used to develop tools and frameworks that incorporate this understanding into planning and management. The applicability of these concepts is apparent in frameworks and tools developed by agencies such as the USDA Forest Service (Fight et al. 2000) and the Environmental Protection Agency (Environmental Protection Agency 2002). In this special section, we present a collection of studies that help illustrate and define concepts related to place.

The place-related papers here were presented at the 2000 International Symposium on Society and Resource Management (ISSRM) in Bellingham, Washington. Since 1986, ISSRM has convened on a biennial basis to bring natural resource managers and social scientists together in discussions and demonstrations of how social science can improve resource management decision-making. The quantity of papers related to place at the 2000 symposium demonstrates the high degree of interest and quality of attention being paid to this topic.

For those unfamiliar with literature on place, a brief introduction is in order. Agnew and Duncan (1989, p. 2) describe three ways place has been used in social theory. As *location*, place can mean "the spatial distribution of social and economic activities" that results from different costs of doing business in different places. Place as *locale*, on the other hand, provides the setting or backdrop for everyday activity. *Sense of place* involves individual or group identification with a place resulting from interaction with it. Although these concepts are often seen as competing and incompatible, Agnew and Duncan (1989) argue that place simultaneously encompasses all three aspects.

Pred (1984) views place as a *process* of transforming and appropriating nature and space, simultaneous with and inseparable from the transformation and reproduction of society. Thus, place can be understood as process rather than something "out there" separate from, or that can be separated from, the people who create and define it through their day-to-day experiences.

Petrich (1984, p. 67) suggests the most important aspect of the "specialness" of places is a holistic characteristic that involves past experience and social and cultural meanings

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identified with the place such that the place "elicits an appreciation and attachment beyond the observable features of the landscape." Thus, to know or understand place requires us to look at place from a perspective that encompasses and can illuminate meaning and action. Meanings are expressed through enactment and engagement, which are social activities and thus observable and apprehendable using an interpretive methodology.

Krannich et al. (1994) found that understanding symbolic dimensions of environments is critical to understanding the implications of environmental change and why conflicts over resource management become so contentious. Others have noted the importance of recognizing the socially constructed meanings associated with settings and locations people care about (Brandenburg and Carroll 1995, Greider and Garkovich 1994, Kemmis 1990).

However, place is defined, many social scientists (Bengston 1994, Brandenburg and Carroll 1995, Williams and Patterson 1996) agree that research has focused more on tangible and instrumental meanings while neglecting historic, cultural, and spiritual meanings. They argue that conflicts over resource management are related to an almost exclusive reliance on the predominant Western approach to science (Entrikin 1991, Orr 1992, Sagoff 1992 a,b), which has led to an oversimplification of meanings and values (Bengston 1994, Wilkinson 1992). The limited perspective that results can be traced to the tendency to choose theories and methods that favor technical and instrumental knowledge over interpretive and social knowledge. Economic values and narrowly defined empirical variables have been counted and measured while other values and meanings have been discounted or disregarded as "nonempirical."

Managers are seeking ways to incorporate this knowledge of place into resource planning and management, and social scientists (Brandenburg and Carroll 1995, Brunson et al. 1996, Mitchell et al. 1993) have called for tools and conceptual frameworks that allow managers to access, assess, inventory and monitor sociocultural *meanings* of places in order to incorporate socially relevant meanings into social inquiry and planning processes. These new tools would supplement current approaches to accommodate participation by diverse interests and inclusion and integration of various types of knowledge. For example, significant attention is being focused on the role of place and its influence on people's recreation and tourism choices and experiences (Bricker and Kerstetten 2000, Bridgers 2000) and the acceptability of resource management decisions (Cheng et al. 2003). Managers are finding ways to record and map local knowledge, meanings of places, and other social and cultural information and use this knowledge in planning and management.

The papers in this special issue present a variety of perspectives on place and the relations people have with places. They recognize and further the potential of place research to inform forest policy, planning, and management.

In the first article, Stedman presents an overview of the place-based research and proposes a compendium of quantitative research that could help develop sense of place as a useful management tool. He pleads for greater complexity and theoretical richness in measurement related to studies of place. He clarifies themes explored in sense of place literature and suggests the themes should be reflected more strongly in research. Stedman suggests that by following his suggestions, concepts associated with place can be made more accessible and user friendly, and thus increase the utility of place as a management tool for resource managers.

Williams and Vaske focus on the measurement theme as they evaluate psychometric properties of a place attachment measure and examine the validity and generalizability of place attachment. Data from students at two universities and visitors to a national park and a national recreation area were analyzed and compared. The authors found that attachment increased in relation to increasing frequency of visitation, perceived familiarity, and the belief that the place was special.

Cheng and Daniels address the interactions between geographic scale, stakeholder participation, and individual stakeholder ways of knowing. The authors identify three factors they suggest affect development of shared ways of knowing. They ask, "How does geographic scale affect working relations in a collaborative stakeholder process?" In their article they identify patterns of ways of knowing at different geographic scales and describe how these patterns may affect development of shared understanding. The article draws from a comparative study of two watershed councils in western Oregon. The authors hope that improved understanding of the effect of different geographic scales and ways of knowing may help managers design more robust collaborative processes. These authors support Williams and Vaske in a call for additional research to further understanding of place attachment, factors that influence attachments, and attachments that influence attitudes toward land management and participation in planning processes.

While much research has focused on shared meanings and using place-based approaches to achieve common ground, Yung, Freidmund, and Belsky demonstrate that there can be multiple and conflicting meanings and many senses of place for the same place. The authors examine people's images, values, and interests related to the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. By examining discourse about place names, the authors explore how place meanings are connected to ideas about property, conservation, and governance. The authors suggest knowledge of the politics of place can help managers understand natural resource conflict and better evaluate potential effectiveness of decision-making processes. They emphasize that understanding contested meanings of place is important for managers because sense of place and place meanings are often connected to attitudes and expectations about appropriate and inappropriate management or use. Managers need to be aware of both shared and contested meanings. Paying attention to differences, the authors suggest, may lead to more productive dialogue.

Clark and Stein combine measures of place attachment and sense of place with measures of community attachment to examine attitudes and behavior of residents toward nearby areas. In their Florida study they find the physical natural landscape important to how some people relate to their

community. They find that both landscape-oriented and socially oriented people are interested in the management of public lands and have high levels of community attachment. The authors suggest that residents view public lands as part of the overall community rather than something separate from the community.

In the final paper, Moore and Scott also examine the relations that people develop with a nearby area. They focus more specifically on the extent to which people become attached to a specific site versus its larger setting. The authors compare user attachment to a large metropolitan park near Cleveland, Ohio, with attachment to a trail within the park. They also examine the extent to which proximity, frequency of use, activity type, and activity commitment relate to attachment. Moore and Scott suggest that managers identify special places and manage them carefully in order to improve user satisfaction and community relations. Residents in close proximity to a place have particular potential as volunteers and members of partnerships and friends groups. These people are also most likely to become active opponents if they sense that what they value about the place is at risk.

The papers in this special section provide a range of approaches to and perspectives on place research. We hope that the variety represented helps raise awareness of the topic among researchers and managers and stimulates further work in this area.

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