



Social information – benefit or burden in urban forest planning?

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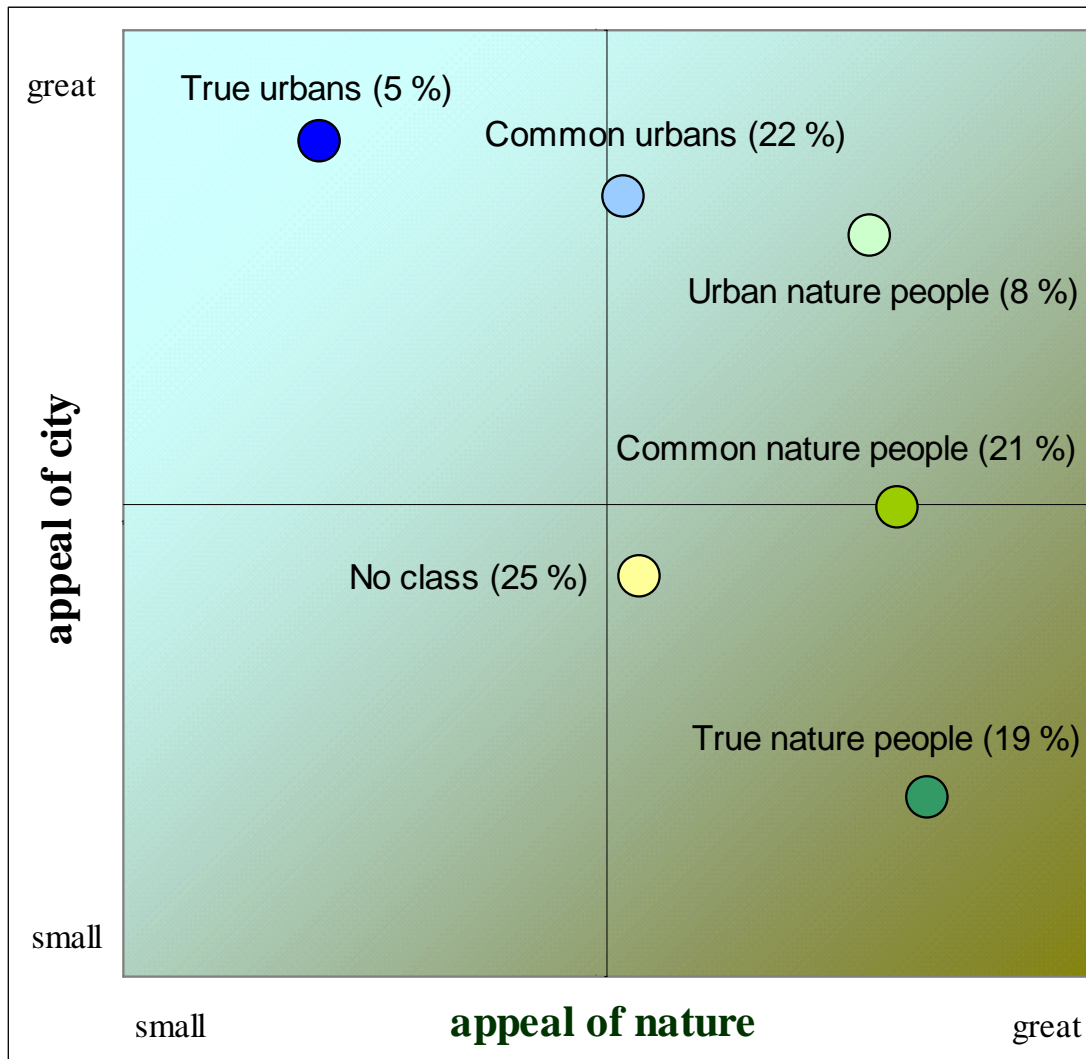
**Integrating social and cultural information in
urban forest planning and management**

**at the IUFRO Division VI Symposium:
Integrative Science for Integrative Management**

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METLA

Classification of residents



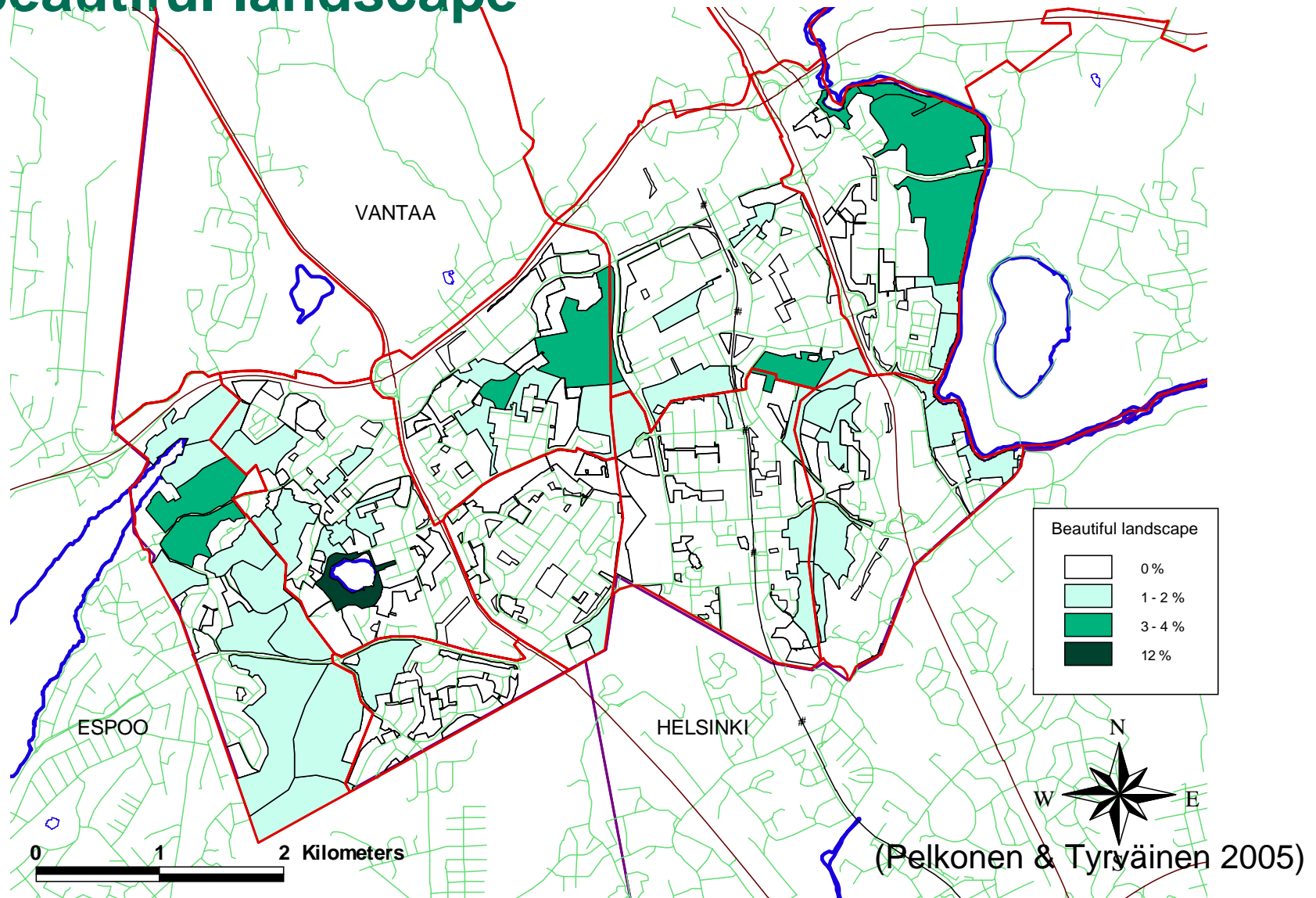
(Tyrväinen et al. 2007)

Meanings of urban forests for residents

- favourite places of residents are more often in nature areas (especially forest areas) than in built-up environments
- being in nature influences mental health positively
- weekly contact with nature within work or studies increases positive emotions and decreases negative emotions (Tyrväinen et al. 2007)

- perceiving and experiencing nature is subjective
- what kind of and how managed environment is healthy and positively experienced?

Urban forests of Western Vantaa: beautiful landscape



Social information for urban forest planning

- citizens have a right to influence decision making concerning their living environment (The Constitution 731/1999, Local Government Act 365/1995, Land Use and Building Act 132/1999)
- municipal decision making should reflect the values of citizens (Niiranen 1997)
- citizens' expertise needed in defining 'urban environmental quality' (Bonnes et al. 2007)
- citizens' expertise on local ecological issues valuable alongside with scientific ecological information (Yli-Pelkonen 2006)

Benefit of collaboration in planning?

- the praxis of urban planning does not sufficiently support the interaction between the citizens' knowledge and that of planning expertise (Staffans 2004)
- a majority of the residents who had participated in the collaborative groups felt that they had affected the green area plans noticeably (Sipilä & Tyrväinen 2005)
- but: most residents agreed that they had been given an over-optimistic idea of how much they could influence the green area plans (Sipilä & Tyrväinen 2005)
- how and with what kind of arguments is valid and useful information defined? (Bäcklund, forthcoming)
- how to collect usable information and how to integrate it in planning and decision making?

Integrating social information in urban planning

- sub-study of GREENDECISION - Integrating ecological and social information in urban planning
- Academy of Finland 2006-2008
- Finnish Forest Research Institute & University of Helsinki

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<http://www.helsinki.fi/biosci/jariniemela/research/greendecision.htm>

<http://www.metsantutkimuslaitos.fi/hanke/7220/index-en.htm>

Integrating social information in urban planning

Key research objectives

- (1) criteria for evaluating land use and green area planning processes in terms of social information on green areas and public involvement
- (2) addressing the availability, quality and use of social information in urban planning and decision making
- (3) addressing the quality of urban planning processes, including e.g. quality of participation and decisions
- (4) understanding the relation between social and ecological values in stakeholders' relationship to the environment, and in planning and decision making

Research methods

Developing of the evaluation criteria

- spring 2007: semi-structured expert interviews
 - 33 actors who had been involved in planning processes on case areas
 - decision makers, city authorities, citizens, landowners
- autumn 2007: focus groups
- 2008: testing of the criteria: e.g. structured interviews, questionnaire, document analysis, participatory observation

Case areas



Preliminary results from the interviews

Why is collaboration with citizens needed in planning concerning urban forests?

Very varying views:

- "the information is transferred, so that the planning and refining can be based on the best information available"
- "people have much information on the near environment and nature, such that we do not know"
- "that people would accept the coming changes and learn to live in the changed environment"
- "I do not know whether it is needed in forest planning either... the feedback we got [through collaboration] is just nothing.... [the role of collaboration] is the ostensible possibility to influence, keeping the illusion"

How should social values of urban forests be considered in relation to ecological values?

Equally

- "these [ecological and social values] should be equal"

Ecology comes first

- "it is the value of nature that has to be the strong argument"
- "people want to get rid of the bushes but they do not necessarily know that there is a lesser spotted woodpecker living there...although they say that the customer is right so in this case the resident is not necessarily right"

Social values can bypass ecological

- "they are such values that sometimes they just do not match but then you just have to accept it. Sometimes it feels that such a great importance in this ragged green structure that is left in this city.. Recreation and landscape values are important too. If there happens to be some winged, they often can move... Does it have to remain in Helsinki, one single occurrence, if there are plenty of it in the country..."

Ecological and social values are not in conflict

- "I would not see there any notable conflict. If ecology is taken into account and for instance some thicket is preserved... I cannot understand that it would disturb someone's life"

Conclusions

- people's interest in and knowledge of urban forests a valuable resource for planners
- how should planning emphasize, on the other hand, implementing policy decisions, and transmitting information from citizens to decision making on the other?
- understanding what do people want from collaboration in planning is a prerequisite for organizing collaboration efficiently
- tools are needed that help
 - evaluating different approaches used in collaborative planning
 - organizing collaboration accordingly
 - integrating social information with ecological information
- Greendecision will contribute with an “evaluation tool”, aiming to help organizing efficient and effective collaboration

THANK YOU!

