Seeing the Landscape through New Eyes: Identifying and incorporating indigenous landscape values into regional planning processes

This paper contains traditional cultural knowledge of the South East Queensland (SEQ) indigenous community. It was created with the consent of the Goori/Murri Nation custodians. The pilot study, upon which this paper is based, was supported by Griffith University, SEQ Catchments and the former Office of Urban Management (now Department of Infrastructure and Planning) under the Griffith University Industry Collaborative Scheme (GUICS). The South East Queensland Traditional Owners Alliance (SEQTOA) was also an important research partner. SEQTOA is the peak body to represent and advance Traditional Owner interests in cultural and natural resource management. Darren Burns (a contributing author for this paper) is a Board member of SEQTOA.

Subsequently, an ARC Linkage Grant has been secured to continue this research for a further two years which is aimed at operationalising these concepts.

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Introduction
This paper addresses indigenous landscape values and how they align with the values-led approaches upon which much current planning practices are based (Thomas 1994; Upton 2002). Values-led planning approaches need to be informed by scientifically validated community values that are supported by the communities they represent. In recognition of this, planning policies are beginning to call for the recognition, protection and conservation of cultural values as stated in the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2036 (The State of Queensland 2009:1). Given the regional scale of strategic planning activities in Queensland, it is imperative to establish whether the landscape values of the indigenous community are applicable at this scale. There is limited understanding of indigenous landscape values or guidance on how to actually address them in regional planning activities.

The research question guiding this one year pilot study (and the ensuing two year ARC Linkage project) is:

Can indigenous landscape values be identified and represented in ways that respect indigenous culture and represent their interest in conventional regional planning processes?

Three specific objectives were identified to guide the research process, namely:
- **Objective 1:** To articulate indigenous landscape values for South East Queensland (SEQ)
- **Objective 2:** To explore a range of representations of indigenous landscape values
- **Objective 3:** To explore potential ways to incorporate indigenous landscape values into SEQ regional planning processes.

Method
The research question and its associated objectives in the pilot study were addressed through the employment of a case study approach. A preliminary review of relevant literature was conducted to:
- Scope the extent to which indigenous perspectives are being incorporated into public policy;
- Verify the appropriateness of the regional landscape scale;
- Define values and their relevance to planning; and
- Scope international and national knowledge on indigenous landscape values.

Subsequently, two regional-scale workshops were conducted involving the indigenous community of SEQ (including both Traditional Owners and non-traditional owners). This inclusive approach acknowledges that any member of the indigenous community is subject to the traditional protocols of the area. The SEQ case study was adopted based on the four indigenous sub-regions of SEQ:
- Northern Sub-region (Noosa River-Pine River) (Gubbi Gubbi, Kabi Kabi, Jinibara, Dalungbara);
- Central Sub-region (Pine River-Logan River) (Jagera, (Jagera, Yuggera, Ugarapul) Jinibara);
- Eastern Sub-region (Moreton Bay Islands and adjacent land / sea) (Quandamooka, Ngugi, Noonucle, Gorenput); and
- Southern Sub-region (Logan River-NSW Border) (Yugambeh (8 tribes), Ngarang-Wal/Kombumerri, Mulanjarlie).

SEQTOA's established reputation and contact network amongst Traditional Owners and Non-Traditional Owners enabled them to serve as gatekeepers to the SEQ indigenous community during this research.

Each workshop opened with a ‘Welcome to Country’ and cultural performance to reiterate the regional landscape as the common frame of reference between participants as well as the scale of reference for the workshop and the research. The workshops primarily addressed Objectives 1 and 2 and were structured around questions such as ‘What is it in the regional landscape of the Goori/Murri Nation that is important and has value to you?’ and ‘How have these elements/values changed over time?’ To support these answers, participants were asked to ‘Describe specific examples and representations of the landscape elements/values in your sub-region’. For the purposes of academic rigour, only workshop responses that could be verified from other sources have been reported (examples of supplementary sources include: (King and Crosby 2004; SEQTOA 2008; Steele 1983; Wells 2003)).

Literature Review
Indigenous representation in public policy
At an international level, there have been increasing calls to acknowledge and respect indigenous rights and culturally diverse values. The European Landscape Convention and the Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples’ Issues (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2008) attest to these popular views in public policy. In the planning profession, principles of engagement and protocols for acknowledging traditional knowledge (such as (Australian Government 2004; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Studies 2000) are slowly helping to guide planning practice.

The European Landscape Convention requires its' signatories to enact legally binding landscape protection, management and planning measures that incorporate the perspectives of all interested groups (Jones 2007). However, Antrop argues that "The European Landscape Convention essentially aims to bridge the past with
future landscapes, but it is not very specific on how to proceed." (2005:23). Throughout the literature, it is evident that existing public policy typically struggles to capture the holistic and changing nature of different values systems and how these are played out in the landscape (Antrop 2005; Australian Institute of Landscape Architects (AILA) 2009; Bastian, Krönert and Lipský 2006; Berge 2006).

The dynamic regional landscape
The regional scale is currently attracting a lot of academic and political attention in the search for sustainable outcomes for the landscape (Commonwealth of Australia 2008; Keogh, Chant and Frazer 2006; Wheeler 2009). The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Antrop 2005; Jones 2007). Essentially, at the landscape scale we can observe the relationship between people and place (Bohnet, Kinjun and Roberts 2006; Selman 2006; Stedman 2003).

The regional landscape simultaneously embodies our heritage as well as opportunities for the future (Antrop 2005; Stephenson 2008). Numerous case studies highlight the difficulty of maintaining a strong sense of connection to the landscape when it undergoes radical change (Bergman et al. 2008; Lewis and Sheppard 2005; Peil 2006; Stephenson 2008; Terkenli 2001). For example, Bergman et al. (2008:1) explains that northern Scandinavian landscapes were once "laden with religious significance" for the native Sami people. However conflict with Swedish and Christian societies and forced abandonment of the traditional way of life for Sami people led to an almost complete annihilation of those landscape elements and values. This raises the question: Is this true for traditional indigenous landscapes in post-colonial Australia?

Values-led planning approaches
Values represent our different perspectives on what is important in life and in the world. Values are a significant component of ‘culture’ (Hawkes 2001) and have the potential to significantly influence planning and its physical outcomes in an area:

> Public planning, at all tiers of government, is the crucible in which ... the most coherent expression of a society’s aspirations may emerge – if, that is, the planning processes are themselves imbued with the values of the society those processes serve.
> ... sometimes these values are formally expressed, more often, they are simply assumed. (Hawkes 2001:5)

The increasing uptake of ‘values-led’ planning approaches in Australia has encouraged the formal identification of broad community values. In the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2036, a number of conceptual landscape types have been accepted by all stakeholders, such as the working, leisure and viewed landscapes (Low Choy 2008). Most have been, or are being, addressed by an appropriate study or strategy (for example the Rural Futures Study, Outdoor Recreation Strategy or Scenic Amenity Study).

Indigenous landscape values
Regional planning Australia-wide has proceeded without the same attention for indigenous landscapes as for the other competing landscape types (Jackson 2008), despite the appropriateness of the regional scale:

> “For Aboriginal activity...it is best to view the area within its wider regional context, which incorporates all the various elements of season, environment, social interactions, ceremony and resource availability” (King and Crosby 2004:8).

A large volume of indigenous consultation is undertaken for land use planning and natural resource management, however indigenous input (with a few exceptions) is seldom visible in the project outputs (Smyth, Szabo and George 2004). Indigenous knowledge and values are often seemingly “incompatible” with contemporary European values, in terms of format and structure (Baker, Sipe and Gleeson 2006; Brown 2006; Dramstad et al. 2006; Jackson 2008; Jones 2007; Lane 2006; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008; Stephenson 2008). As a result, it is worthwhile for planners to critically assess the wide variety of disciplinary approaches to representing indigenous landscape values. Examples include cartographic techniques (Brown and Raymond 2007; Dramstad et al. 2006; Peil 2006), landscape visualisation techniques (Dramstad et al. 2006; Lewis and Sheppard 2006; MacFarlane et al. 2005), digital techniques (Australian Cultural Resource Centre for Interaction Design 2008; Ervin and Hasbrouck 2001; Leavy et al. 2007) and emerging techniques such as indigenous foodscapes (Panelli and Tipa 2008).

There are also numerous different attempts to capture the complex, interrelated and dynamic nature of indigenous values (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 2006; King and Crosby 2004; Stephenson 2008). ‘Sense of place’ has become a dominant concept for thinking about the holistic relationship between people and the natural environment (Stedman 2003). The Australian case study that exemplifies ‘sense of place’ is the Ngurra-kurlu concept (depicted in Figure 1).
In Figure 1, Ngurra-kurlu shows the interconnection of the physical landscape (country) with the language, law, identity / kinship (skin) and ceremonial features of indigenous society. In other words, the landscape, belief system and way of life for indigenous peoples are all inextricably linked.

A framework to deal with multiple sets of values?
Both planning theory and practice have recognised the importance of balancing different sets of values (Bohnet and Smith 2007; Stephenson 2008). Stephenson (2008:138) argues that "While it is unnecessary for different forms of landscape knowledge to share a methodology or a theoretical foundation, the key is a common frame of reference that has a reasonable fit with the range of ways in which disciplines and communities perceive and value landscape". Although Stephenson's Cultural Values Model (Figure 2) is yet to be rigorously tested and critiqued, it may be a useful framework capable of drawing together the wide range of possible values and representations.

This model uses three categories of landscape values, namely forms, practices and relationships, and shows that these values interact and change over time. The distinction between surface and embedded values acknowledges the difference between values that are immediately recognisable in the contemporary landscape and values that involve an awareness of past landscapes.

In conclusion, there is a strong call throughout the literature to understand and incorporate indigenous landscape values in planning. However, maintaining the integrity of those values is equally as important as producing an actionable and sustainable process that fits within existing regional planning processes.

Results and Analysis

Workshop Attendance
64 people participated in Workshop 1 and 26 people participated in Workshop 2. There was representation (of elders and others) across all four sub-regions and included non-traditional owners in South East Queensland.

Temporal Dimensions
Workshop participants explained that connection to country is fundamentally derived from the spiritual realm through an understanding of the ancestral origin, genesis and creation of features in the regional landscape. It is not only relevant to the past but also, governs appropriate ways of being and operating in the present. Thus, connection to country pervades all elements and values of the regional landscape. Despite general agreement on most values, subtle differences of opinion arose about how the values are interrelated.
Thematic Diversity
In Workshop 1, the thematic diversity of the 15 articulated values was extremely wide. In Workshop 2, participants provided more detail on each value and refined the initial list. It was necessary to make a clear conceptual distinction between ‘elements’ and ‘values’. Elements are a geographical component or feature of the regional landscape, such as rivers, lakes, mountains, valleys and rocks. Values on the other hand are things (such as beliefs, ideals and physical objects) that are considered important to people.

Key Elements
Four key elements emerged repeatedly in the workshops that exhibited obvious links to contemporary physical landscape planning; namely boundaries, pathways, biodiversity and important sites / areas.

Boundaries
Traditional boundaries help to define ‘country’ (“where I belong”) and contribute to sense of place. They are created and perpetuated through lore, law, custom and kinship. Three types of traditional boundaries were identified: natural boundaries and language boundaries. Natural boundaries are landscape features that create an obvious division in the landscape, such as creeks, rivers, channels, mountains and mountain ranges. Natural boundaries are a common way of distinguishing between tribal territories and thus, are strictly protected.

Invented and language boundaries are more intangible. Invented boundaries are typically created through myth and stories for the purpose of community safety (especially children). Forbidden and dangerous places, such as swamps, lakes and snake habitats, can be addressed by creating a notional limit to access. Language boundaries (such as SEQ’s four sub-regions) are based on the degree of similarity or difference in the dialects and languages across the region.

It was noted that some traditional boundaries are contested or have changed over time. In some cases, changes to the ‘ownership’ of territory (and location of boundaries) are negotiated through law and custom. For example, expansion of territory (and access to resources) was often necessary when clans grew in size or kinship changed (such as inter-tribal marriages). In other cases however, forced adjustment of traditional boundaries has resulted from battles over country (such as contemporary native title and land council negotiations). Traditionally, boundaries are not narrow lines but wide areas that can be walked through (pathways) and to some extent form common ground between groups.

Pathways
Pathways are passages of land used to move through the landscape. The nature and location of pathways depends upon the availability of food, water and shelter (to sustain the journey) and safe, easily negotiated routes that link the journey’s origin and destination. Pathways typically connect different groups of people and important sites (including boundary corners, sacred, ceremonial, meeting and habitation sites).

Valleys, wildlife corridors, beaches / shorelines, waterways / channels / currents and tides and ridgelines are frequently recognised as pathways. These pathways were (and still are) used as social, trade and seasonal routes. In some locations, the construction of transport infrastructure along pathways has destroyed the important sites at the origins or destinations of that pathway.

Biodiversity
There are three main ways that biodiversity is identified in the regional landscape:

- Interpretation of ‘bush calendar’ (including animal behaviour, flowering and growth seasons)
- Interpretation of indicators and warning signs (especially from fauna)
- Presence and absence of totemic species and their habitats

A totem is typically an animal or plant species that is in some way connected to, associated with, and / or representative of, a clan group, family or even an individual. In SEQ, the spatial distribution of flora and fauna species was considered the primary factor influencing which totems are assigned to which people. This means that when traversing the landscape, the presence or absence of different species (and their respective habitats) indicates the territory of different totemic groups.

Totemic identity creates an unbreakable spiritual connection between the regional landscape and each individual. It creates a set of protection and conservation responsibilities. Deep knowledge of the totem’s spatial distribution and behaviour patterns can serve as an indicator of environmental change. Workshop participants noted that biodiversity changes can often be felt in a spiritual manner. Biodiversity changes (including natural adaptation) influence the way indigenous communities interact with the landscape.
Important site / areas
This category is an agglomeration of several elements that emerged during the workshops, including women’s and men’s places, ceremonial areas, habitation sites, mission sites and battlefield sites. Access rights to some sites depend upon kinship structures in the area, the status of the person wishing to visit and the specific circumstance. Despite this limited access, these places still hold significance for the wider indigenous community. Some ceremonial, festival and corroboree sites are a fundamental part of internal and external social relations for indigenous communities.

Traditional habitation areas, battlefields and mission sites were dependent on the availability of food, water, firewood and other resources. Traditional habitation areas were typically sited on elevated land. In the Eastern sub-region, Myora Swamp at Amity was originally the Moongalba traditional campsite (in a strategic resource and meeting location), later becoming a battle and mission site. Workshop participants noted that battles between Indigenous and European groups were primarily linked to the productive capacity of the land and its’ suitability for occupation. As a result, European land holdings and production areas were often located on important sites and areas for indigenous communities.

Discussion
This pilot study confirmed the validity of the regional approach from both an academic perspective and for indigenous landscape values in the SEQ case study area. This region is known to the indigenous community as the Murri nation and thus, participants felt comfortable thinking collectively at this scale. Furthermore, the sub-regional language groups were accepted by all participants and proved to be a useful framework for organising the findings (with place-based examples). Representation (of elders and other members) from all four sub-regions and non-traditional owners helped to achieve a balanced perspective on the commonly-held indigenous values in the region.

Traditional boundaries, pathways, biodiversity and important sites and areas were selected as four key landscape elements that underpin numerous indigenous values. These four elements also show significant potential for integration into existing planning policy in SEQ. The biodiversity findings, for example, provide insight into possible mechanisms to enhance the sustainability of regional planning practices. Given that the strong connection to country (created through totemic identity) ensured sustainable landscape management throughout pre-colonial Australian history, it is worth asking whether assigning responsibility to inhabitants of the land is a viable technique for contemporary landscape planning and management.

Figure 3 attempts to convey the complexity of the relationship between each landscape element in the regional landscape and the way of life for the SEQ indigenous community. It positions regional planning activities (guided by community values) as central to the ongoing relationship between the regional landscape and the indigenous community in SEQ.

The four landscape elements identified in the workshops align with the current and ongoing planning commitments of the principal agencies responsible for land use and environmental planning and natural resource management in SEQ. Thus, these research findings offer a promising starting point to enhance cultural accountability and sustainability of contemporary regional planning.
Conclusion

Across the international fields of public policy, landscape management, strategic planning and more, there are increasing calls to acknowledge and respect indigenous rights and culturally diverse values. This is especially important for South East Queensland, given that it has adopted a ('best practice') values-led strategic regional planning approach. The findings of this pilot study suggest that it is possible to identify indigenous landscape values at the regional scale in South East Queensland. The four key elements (and their associated values) that showed the greatest potential for incorporation into conventional regional planning processes are boundaries, pathways, biodiversity and important sites / areas. These findings provide a solid foundation for further investigation into indigenous landscape values and strategic regional planning. Any further research must endeavour to balance academic rigour, respect for indigenous perspectives and the practicalities of current regional planning practices in order to produce meaningful outcomes.

Reference List

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