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Involving Locals in Nature Policy and Planning by Investigating Emotional Values of Places: The Case of the Boschplaat, Terschelling

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Title: Involving Locals in Nature Policy and Planning by Investigating Emotional Values of Places: The Case of the Boschplaat, Terschelling

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Abstract:

In the Netherlands, ecological and economic values of nature often form the basis of nature policy and planning, whereas emotional values tend to be neglected. This has led to misunderstandings and resistance against policies regarding nature areas among a general public. In this paper, a case study is presented in which inhabitants' emotional values of nature are explored as part of a nature policy plan.

The case study concerns the involvement of inhabitants with the future plans for the protected area of the Boschplaat on the Wadden island of Terschelling. This area is managed and owned by the Forestry Commission, a large national nature organisation in the Netherlands which owns many protected areas in the Netherlands. For the protected area of the Boschplaat, the Forestry Commission formulated a future vision with the aim to improve biodiversity and resilience of the area. One of the measures to increase the natural dynamics is the plan to make a hole in the dike. This dike has been there since the 1930s, and over the years, it has been covered by sand dunes. However, making a hole in a dike is a sensitive measure for island inhabitants. On top of that, local inhabitants have many memories related to the dike and the Boschplaat. The sand dunes along the dike also hold tangible cultural heritage, such as objects from shipwrecks, and items from the second world war. The Boschplaat is thus not only a protected nature area, it is also an area with a rich cultural history and special meanings to local inhabitants.

To reveal local people's special meanings and experiences about the Boschplaat, local inhabitants were interviewed. The methodology which used was 'walk along' interviews, as developed by Carpiano (2009). This relatively novel qualitative research method is suitable for gaining insight into people's emotional relationship with a specific place. The method has first been used by Lynch (1960) to study how people interact with their daily environment. According to Carpiano (2009), walk along interviews form a combination of fieldwork and in-depth interviews. Local inhabitants were asked to take the interviewee to their favorite place or places on the Boschplaat and tell them about their memories and experiences with this place. The interviewee selects the place, time of day, and route, and thus becomes the guide. The local inhabitants are invited to tell stories about their special place.

The results will be used to communicate the special meanings of the Boschplaat and the dike to inhabitants and visitors. Storytelling will be used to transfer emotional meanings of local inhabitants with the Boschplaat.

Carpiano, R. M. (2009). Come take a walk with me: The 'Go-Along' interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health, & Place*, 15, 263–272.
