

## Visitor Perceptions of Cultural Ecosystem Services in Landscape: The Challenges of Evaluation

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### Abstract

Ecosystem Services research has so far focused more on economic and monetary values and perspectives rather than socio-cultural ones (Raymond et al., 2014; Scholte, van Teeffelen and Verburg, 2015). Musacchio (2013) and Plieninger et al. (2015) suggests that adding a better understanding of Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) can inform landscape planning. CES are the non-material benefits and notions of well-being connected to ecosystems (e.g. aesthetic value, spirituality, sense of place, inspiration, heritage, education, recreation) and are closely related to socio-cultural attitudes and values. However, Norton et al. (2012) point out that few studies have attempted to provide measures of cultural services as they relate to ecosystems or landscapes. The majority of CES studies have been quantitative because CES tend to be abstract and intangible and therefore difficult to qualify leading to a gap in scientific research between what is measured and what actually matters to people (Milcu et al. 2013). Intangible and experiential dimensions like aesthetics, spirituality or inspiration tend to be neglected (Plieninger et al., 2013; Hernández-Morcillo et al., 2013; Pleasant et al., 2014). The researchers in this study therefore devised a questionnaire on CES consisting of 20 statements with a Likert scale of 7 which was translated and distributed in seven countries (Germany, Hungary, Israel, Macedonia, Netherlands, Poland and Romania) and distributed to visitors in several different kinds of landscape (e.g. forest, seaside, mountains, desert). As well as presenting preliminary results, the paper reflects on the challenges of defining and translating CES terminology and the difficulties inherent in devising appropriate statements that accurately convey the abstract nature of CES categories. Comparing our methods with other studies (e.g. Pleasant et al., 2014; Scholte et al., 2015; Szücs et al, 2015), the article illustrates how quantitative data may be applied to gain a qualitative understanding of visitors' perceptions of CES in landscapes. Following Gould et al. (2014), we found that the process used to study CES is as important as the findings themselves.

**Keywords:** *cultural ecosystem services, evaluation of questionnaires, socio-cultural attitudes, landscape planning*