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SUMMARY

This paper explores the contribution of community woodlands and forests to forest restoration in Great Britain. It examines the definitions, scope and various types of community woodland. It then reviews the evidence available, noting that this is incomplete and project driven. A few programmes have invested in thorough evidence gathering. There is a shift of focus from biophysical (tree planting) to social impact, but monitoring and evaluation still focuses on outputs rather then their longer term and wider effect. Qualitative evidence for empowerment and enhanced community cohesion and creativity suggests a wider range of intangible benefits. It is concluded that some of the richest experiences in community woodlands are documented only informally or not at all, and that this revival of community engagement with woodlands constitutes an important component of forest restoration which should be assessed as an opportunity to shape future restoration.

KEYWORDS: empowerment, evaluation, evidence-based policy, forest restoration

INTRODUCTION

Forest restoration, the theme of this conference, is about more than simply increasing the numbers of trees. In the UK forest cover has risen from 5% to 12% in the last one hundred years. Yet there are still widespread public concerns about deforestation, and attention has shifted from the extent of forest cover to its location and quality, and potential to provide social and environmental benefits. Restoration needs to include attention to the relationship between society and its trees and forests. Community forestry can make a significant contribution to this agenda.

Our paper sets out to ask, 'What contribution have community forests and woodlands made to forest restoration in Great Britain?' In doing so, we are aiming to take stock of the numbers of community woodlands, and their impact, in this country. As we show, this question is complicated by the wide diversity of community woodlands and groups, their objectives and resources, the range of perceptions of monitoring and evaluation, and the patchiness of evidence available. The paper therefore asks a second question, 'how can we know about the contribution of community forests and woodlands to forest restoration in Great Britain?' Space limits the evidence that we can provide here and this paper should be treated as an extended abstract to be followed with a more detailed paper.

Community woods and forests in Great Britain

What does community forestry mean? As indicated in an earlier paper (Lawrence et al., 2009), a wide range of meanings has evolved in Great Britain, with different emphases in England, Scotland and Wales. Forestry, and particularly the increase in forest area, has been steered for 90 years by the Forestry Commission, which in its earlier decades focused on large-scale plantations of exotic conifers. The main 'social' aspect of such forestry was in the provision of rural employment. Greater attention to landscape and ecology (since the 1960s), social and public benefits (since the 1980s) have changed the public face of forestry. Devolution of forest policy to Scotland and Wales at the turn of the millennium has further opened opportunities for communities to become involved.

Community forests and woodlands have been established through
1. *policy-led approaches* which address regeneration of socially and environmentally deprived areas;
2. *community-led approaches* which can be economically, aesthetically or ideologically motivated; and
3. *conservation-led approaches* through which environmental NGOs seek to achieve their objectives by interaction with local communities.

Some are woodlands owned by active groups motivated by cooperative ideals and green economics; others are attractive places to walk the dog, owned by the parish council and maintained by volunteers; others are zones demarcated by planners where extra incentives are offered for new woodland establishment and public access, to address post-industrial malaise.

Understandings of community forests in England are influenced by the Community Forestry programme, whereby 12 community forests were established in the early 1990s:
> *Each Community Forest is a partnership between local authorities and local, regional and national partners including the Forestry Commission and Natural England. The founding basis for each Forest is a government-approved Forest Plan, a 30-year vision of landscape-scale improvement.*
> (www.communityforest.org.uk/aboutenglandsforests.htm)

This focus on the 'forests close to towns and cities where multiple benefits can be is often also referred to as 'urban forestry' or 'social forestry' (Johnston and Shimada 2004).

Elsewhere, and in studies commissioned to document the range of community woodlands that do not fall within this definition (Calvert 2009, Pollard and Tidey 2009, Wilmot and Harris 2009), we have used an alternative definition:
> *A community woodland is a specific woodland in which a community group has some or complete control of the management.*

All these definitions involve people and trees, in a different relationship from that of classical forestry. This paper uses 'community woodland' to refer to the whole range of wooded areas covered by these definitions.

What makes a successful community woodland?

Before assessing the success of community woodlands in Great Britain, it is useful to refer to the international literature which has paid much more attention to the question of defining and evaluating community forestry. Common property resource (CPR) theory highlights criteria for successful CPR management, including characteristics of the resource, the users and the institutions (Gibson et al. 2000). Some of these criteria cannot be easily applied to the British context (e.g. 'users depend on the forest'). However two criteria that are of particular relevance to this paper are (Gibson et al. 2000):

- o institutions allow for monitoring and learning
- o users have a shared idea of the forest.

Monitoring and evaluation must relate to objectives, and so clarity of objectives and 'idea' for the forest is needed. Rather than prejudging what constitutes 'success' we focus on the lessons from community woodlands themselves. This paper is a first step in assessing the extent to which community woodlands are in a position to monitor, evaluate and learn.

It does so by asking:

- what community woodlands are there in Great Britain
- what evidence is there about their impacts and effects
- what does this tell us about the effects of community woodlands
- what does this tell us about the scope for learning?

NUMBERS AND TYPES OF COMMUNITY WOODLANDS IN GREAT BRITAIN

How many community woodlands are there in Great Britain?

Because community woodlands have such a wide range of origins, and represent such a wide range of institutional arrangements, there is no formal record of their number. Table 1 summarises estimates from a range of sources.

TABLE 1 *Estimated numbers of community woodlands in the three countries of Great Britain*

Country	Source	Number of community woodlands
Scotland	Community Woodland Association members www.communitywoods.org/	160 member groups
	Community woodland groups (Edwards et al., 2009)	138 community groups 13 500 members

England	Tidey and Pollard, (2010)	about 300
	Community forests www.communityforest.org.uk/	Originally 12 (currently 7)
Wales	Cydcoed projects Owen, (2008)	163 projects

A preliminary typology for community woodlands in Great Britain

There are many ways in which this diversity of community woodlands could be classified, based on the type of woodland, the economic dependence of the community on the woodland, and the options available for community representation, organisation and ownership. In this paper we consider five types of community woodland. This is not a comprehensive typology, but a selection of five distinctive models often seen in Great Britain

1. Urban regeneration

This type includes the Community Forests described above, and large scale government led programmes such as the Woods in and Around Towns programme in central Scotland (www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-5w2nfz). The initiative comes from government organisations, the land is usually publicly owned, community groups are based on interest and are therefore informal, or sometimes with a formal management agreement.

2. Community resource

This type includes woods and forests that have been bought by a geographically defined community, with a range of objectives that include support for the local economy. Examples are described in Owen (2008) and Lawrence (2009).

3. Economic partnership

This type includes publicly owned forests which a geographically defined community has agreed to manage jointly with the Forestry Commission. The community may be represented through formal channels such as community councils. Examples are described in Forestry Commission Scotland (2005).

4. Community place

This type consists of usually smaller woodlands than the previous types, not usually owned by a community. They may be owned privately or publicly (often local government). The community group usually comprises those concerned about their local environment, and its involvement in woodland management tasks is more common than in management planning. The woodland is a context for recreation and conservation rather than economic activity.

5. Lifestyle alternatives

Woodlands of various sizes fall into this category, from small family woodlands to much larger areas. The community usually consists of an 'interest group' or a group of people who have chosen to live or work together to explore more sustainable lifestyles. As such,

they usually own the woodland, are partially economically dependent on it, and may or may not have formally constituted organisations.

Examples of types 4 and 5 are described in Pollard and Tidey (2009) and Wilmot and Harris (2009).

This paper is a first attempt to compare the kinds of evidence available for each type. As discussed below, the evidence in each category is variable and it is not possible to formally compare the impacts of each type. Rather, these five types are presented as a guide to thinking through the broader issues of impact, and further work needed.

Kinds of evidence available

In searching for evidence of impacts, this work draws on a wide range of data and reports, including the following.
- National surveys and statistics relating to woodland cover and ownership. For example those reported in the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (www.forestry.gov.uk/inventory), and annual forestry statistics about tree planting (www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics).
- Project and programme reports to funders and the public, relating to achievement of targets. These are often available on the programme website (e.g. those for the Mersey Forest, listed at merseyforest.org.uk/pages/us_documents.asp).
- Organisation and network records, including interviews with staff of organisations that aim to support community woodlands.
- Studies and evaluations of projects and programmes (e.g. Owen 2008, Lawrence 2009).
- Published literature including case studies published on the internet, often through networks motivated by community woodland groups themselves (e.g. the 24 case studies described by members of the groups, at www.caledonia.org.uk/socialland/case.htm).
- Country overviews commissioned by Forest Research, specifically to address the gap in knowledge about community woodlands across the three countries (Calvert 2009, Pollard and Tidey 2009, Wilmot and Harris 2009).

Developing the evidence

Whilst most of the evidence for the impacts and outcomes of community forestry projects in Great Britain can at best be described as 'patchy', there are a few exceptions. The Cydcoed programme, which gave grants to 163 community groups across economically deprived parts of Wales, was evaluated through a two year programme covering all 163 participating groups (Owen 2008).

In Scotland, a particularly clear example of community forestry programme evaluation has been developed by the Woods in and Around Towns (WIAT) programme, managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. This has developed through the following stages:
- appraisal (2004)

- baseline study (2006)
- output monitoring (2006 onwards)
- repeat on baseline (2009)
- owners survey (repeat of appraisal) (2010)
- (participatory) outcome monitoring (planning now, for implementation 2011).

As a result, examples of WIAT programme progress indicators now include not only traditional biophysical indicators such as:
- area of urban woodland created
- increase in the proportion of woodland in areas of high deprivation;
-

but also more social indicators such as:

- number of access improvements achieved
- number of urban school pupil visits to woods facilitated
- number of community consultations within the WIAT area
- number of participants in health schemes.

The Central Scotland Forest Trust reports a similar shift. Summarising its achievements since start-up, it noted in 2006 that:

> *The outcomes of environmental improvements have been skewed towards 'physical' rather than 'social' outcomes delivered. CSFT's practical, repeatable methodology captures the most important outcome of all – the impact on the quality of people's lives*. (Central Scotland Forest Trust, 2006).

EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY WOODLANDS AND FORESTS

This section gives examples of some of the impacts demonstrated by the range of evidence available. Space does not permit a full assessment of all the impacts and outcomes demonstrated, and these will be discussed in a later paper.

Environmental impacts

In the context of this conference, with its theme of forest restoration, the contribution of community woodland to both forest area, and forest quality, is of considerable interest. No overview is available of either of these, and as indicated above, the range of ownership types is so wide that the data cannot be extracted from sources such as the National Forest Inventory.

However individual programmes and reports do provide evidence about this. For example national tree planning statistics summarised in Read et al. (2009) show that annual rates of tree planting fluctuated around 5000 ha / yr in England, in the 1990s and early 2000s. Data reported in Lawrence et al. (2009) suggest that in the period 1995-2003 about 20-25% of new planting can therefore be attributed to the community forests. Both total tree planting, and community forest tree planting, have declined steeply since then.

In Scotland, too, the focus until 2004 was on physical inputs and outputs. Hughes (2008) reports the overall achievements of the Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT), including 50 km of hedgerows planted, and 13 million trees planted, resulting in an increase of woodland cover from 11 to 17%.

Many programmes, particularly more recent ones, focus more on woodland quality than on woodland creation. In Wales, the EU funded Cydcoed programme did not achieve its target for new woodland creation, but greatly exceeded its target for bringing woodland into sustainable management (Owen 2008).

Health and well-being impacts

The shift of attention from physical achievements to community involvement is reflected in a number of studies of social benefits. Two examples are summarised in figure 1. Like many other studies, these use quantitative measures as an expression of users' perceptions of social benefits. In both the English case studies (Morris and Doick 2009, 2010) and the Wales case studies (Owen 2008), a majority of respondents agreed that their community woodland helped them to relax, helped to bring the community together and made it a nicer place to live. It would be valuable to conduct a meta-analysis of such studies to detect broader patterns linking social benefits to context and social group.

FIGURE 1 *Range of perceived social benefits from Community Forestry sites in England, and Cydcoed projects in Wales (from data reported in Owen 2008 and Morris and Doick 2009, 2010)*

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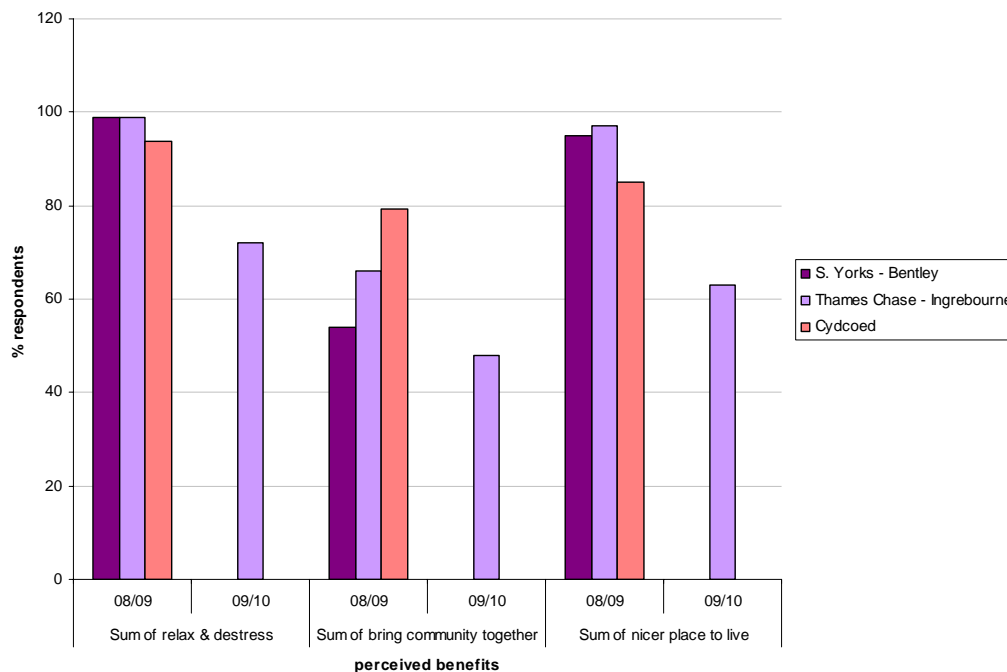
Empowerment

The international literature on community forestry has a strong focus on empowerment as an outcome of strengthened community involvement (Reed 2008). Three examples of such evidence all come from qualitative interviews. Respondents in this study said:

- *There are things we can influence now, like the signs, and like where the trees get planted and where the paths should be opened, you see we know better where these things are going to work, because it doesn't matter how hard [mentions name] works here, he's the Forestry, he doesn't have a hope in hell's chance of really knowing and getting the right answers, real community groups like us, we can make better choices*. (community woodland group member in central Scotland).
- *We have connections now to policy. With the policy divisions, it's a very different relationship because we have more e-mail communication, more of an ongoing expectation and a greater developing relationship now …. We have a different type of contact, more formalised and more of an expectation.* (community woodland group member in north Wales).

The third example comes from communities participating in the National Forest Land Scheme, which supports community purchase of forests formerly in the national forest estate (Lawrence, 2009). Case studies of two early participants in the scheme concluded that capacity building, and empowerment, were not explicit goals of the communities themselves. Although participants did build up their skills, particularly in relation to project management and fundraising, many felt that rural communities already benefited from strong governance and this was not a particular objective of community forestry.

Less tangible outcomes

This brief overview of the impacts of community forestry in Great Britain has moved from the most tangible, easily measured impacts, through quantifiable social impacts, to less easily quantifiable community outcomes. Some effects are even less tangible, and difficult to assess. For example, one respondent in a large community forest in the highlands of Scotland commented (Lawrence, 2009):

> *A lot of us have never owned anything in our lives so for the community it's fantastic. It's symbolic.*

The effects of such 'symbolic' achievements are difficult to measure, but clearly discernible in the less formal literature. For example, the case study of Abriachan Forest Trust (Matheson 2000) points to 'music, drama and dance' to celebrate the millennium; and the newsletters of the environmental movement Reforesting Scotland provide abundant examples of creativity and community interaction around forests (www.reforestingscotland.org).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The evidence

This short paper represents a wide review of the evidence that already exists, to demonstrate the effects of community woodlands in Great Britain. It shows that while there is no exact count of community woodlands (and indeed that would be difficult because of the wide range of definitions), there are probably at least 600, representing a wide range of different kinds of engagement.

Evidence for impacts is patchy. Projects with external funding report against targets defined in the projects, and those reports are sometimes publicly available. Data collection is expensive and therefore only conducted in response to demand. Like much monitoring and evaluation, it focuses on outputs (the immediate products of a project or programme), rather than outcomes (the longer term, wider and less predictable effects of producing those outputs).

There are a few outstanding examples of evidence (including central Scotland (CSFT, WIAT), Mersey Forest, Newlands) which not only document the evidence but also the process for developing the evaluation method. This has shifted from counting numbers of trees planted, to more socially relevant and sometimes more qualitative indicators. There is also a large body of more qualitative and narrative evidence, on websites, in newsletters and other publications. This provides an insight into smaller community-led woodland projects; while it is an important record it is not systematic and impacts are often invisible, except where included in an evaluation of larger programmes such as Cydcoed. One pattern that seems to emerge is that the projects with highest levels of community engagement, and most subjective experiences, have the least formal project funding and therefore produce the least evidence.

Relating effect to type

In relation to the five types selected for an exploratory comparison, the study shows marked differences in both evidence and impact.

The usually top-down 'urban regeneration' types have the most data. They can often demonstrate increased woodland cover, and increased provision of access and opportunities for engagement. A few have gone further and attempted to measure outcomes; these studies do show an increase in recreational use, connection with place, and health and well-being.

Some of the woodlands falling in the 'community resource', and 'economic partnership', types are large scale and with high economic hopes. Many such projects are relatively new and not yet profitable, but the communities involved have built up organisational and business capacity, and demonstrate a strong sense of connection with place.
The 'community place' and 'lifestyle alternative' types are the ones for which least evidence is available. Anecdotally they often show strong group commitment, sense of

place, and contribution to health and well-being; these are however also the types which can sometimes end up excluding some members of the wider community. There is a huge range of experience represented in these types and informal approaches to documenting results could be invaluable as demonstration sites for new and aspiring community woodland groups.

In conclusion, the study shows that there is a wealth of evidence, but that this is unsystematic. It also suggests that in many cases the focus on outputs, rather than outcomes and more qualitative experiences, is leading to missed opportunities for taking stock and learning from this rapidly expanding body of experience relating communities and woodlands. Ultimately, forest restoration is not a return to the past, but creates new habitats, new connections and new experiences.

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