Place Value Identifier

DO YOU KNOW THIS PLACE? IDENTIFYING CITIZENS' PLACE VALUES FOR IMPROVED SPATIAL PLANNING

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SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Spatial projects often meet public resistance, delays are common and planning processes can therefore take long. Resistance to (any) change may be an important reason for opposition. Another reason for resistance may be a lack of local knowledge of place values by often distant project owners. We developed and tested a novel online value mapping tool called the 'Place Value Identifier', which allows marking points, areas and lines on a virtual map. 1227 Dutch citizens indicated which places they value in their living environment and why. They identified 3690 places they valued: 55% marked a point, 36% an area and 9% a route. Participants furthermore specified whether these places need to be either maintained (64%), strengthened (20%), improved (12%) or, connected (3%) which may directly inform project owners of the willingness for potential changes to an area.

Relations to Workpackages

This project gives authorities and practitioners new skills and knowledge to develop new ways to engage with communities and to increase our value mapping techniques which may assist policy-makers in designing and selecting plan alternatives that invoke little public resistance.

Local partners

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Spatial planning

In a densely populated country like the Netherlands, space can be limited. Many activities such as living, working, recreation, traffic and transport need to be located somewhere in the available space. This scarcity can lead to conflicts, as many interests are competing over the setting up and using of space. Major spatial projects (such as roads or neighbourhoods) often lead to sharp discussions. Another reason for resistance may be a lack of local knowledge of place values by often distant project owners.

The assumption is that an integrated approach to spatial planning provides added value. But what is that added value and in what factors is it exactly? We can take road infrastructure and the surrounding area together and then conclude that they are difficult to compare. Now what? It is always a comparison between what it is now and what a possible alternative future could be. We start from the point that a space or an area is not emptiness. In other words: What does the area have already and how do we use it?

Neighbourhood development

Three dilemmas

Anne Marel Hilbers (PhD researcher at University of Groningen): "Together with my research team we are trying to make the transition from economic value to spatial value, and from effects on 'the consumer' to effects on 'the citizen'". In our search for a form of integrated evaluation, we have found three dilemmas:

1. integrated projects require different evaluation: traditionally evaluation often uses hard figures to select an "optimal plan alternative".

2. in practice, a project often starts with a problem definition, after which a solution needs to be found right away. For example: we are widening a road because there are accessibility issues. We state: take a step back. Take a good look at the area. What is it all about?

3. spatial projects often provoke resistance from public local stakeholders. This can translate into a negative value judgment about a project and can make planning of these projects difficult. But what happens to that value if you involve these local stakeholders properly?

The three dilemma's challenge us to find a way to turn the process of decision-making in integrated planning around. Place values then serve as a precondition in the design of different alternatives for spatial projects.

Decision-making, then:
1.	not only needs to incorporate specific (soft) place values to facilitate the selection of an acceptable – instead of optimal – plan alternative, but;
2.	also needs to start with a shared understanding of these key place values, and;
3.	needs more insight in data that is generated through, instead of about, citizens and relevant stakeholders in order to reach the selection of an acceptable plan alternative.

Online value mapping tool

The online value mapping tool called 'Place Value Identifier' was developed to give citizens the opportunity to rate places they value in their living environment. Participants identified 3690 places they valued: 55% marked a point, 36% an area and 9% a route. Participants furthermore specified whether these places need to be either maintained (64%), strengthened (20%), improved (12%) or, connected (3%) which may directly inform project owners of the willingness for potential changes to an area. Finally, respondents scored these places relative to each other by distributing a limited amount of points over them, which informs project owners about the eventual trade-offs citizens would be willing to make if one of their places may be affected.
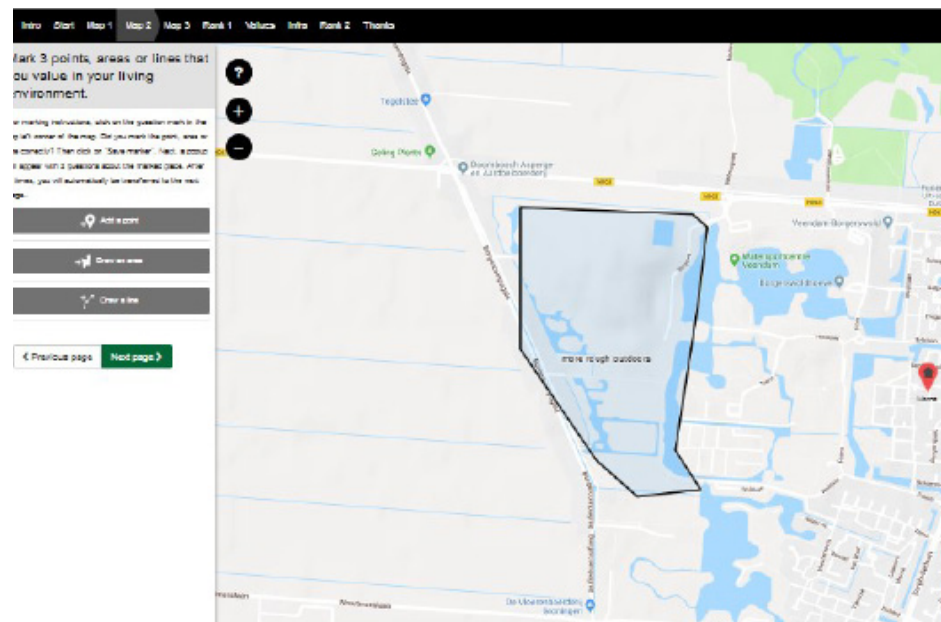
Value mapping tool
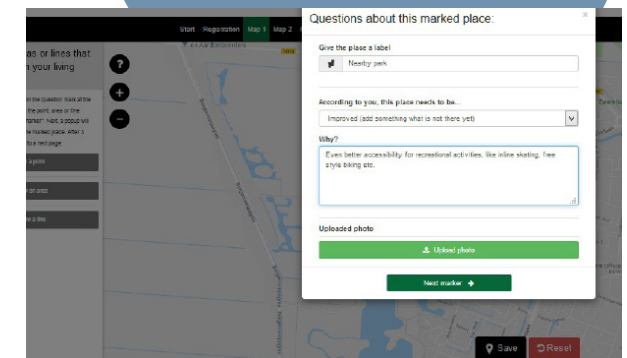
Marking development areas

Overall, participants scored relatively high on 'water-bodies', 'ecology and biodiversity' and 'wellbeing and health'. This location-based experiential information can be a welcome addition to the other layers of informati-on in evidence-based planning, where the active use of a wide range of various types of knowledge, different ways to collect, analyse and deliver data are essential elements of planning.