Nature on Your Mind – creation of shapes and environments

Prof. Simon Bell
Estonian University of Life Sciences
“Thousands of tired, nerve shaken, overcivilised people are beginning to find that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reserves are useful not only as fountains of timber and invigorating rivers but as fountains of life.”
Escaping from the city

• Urban environments constantly bombard us with stimulation and living or working there requires constant concentration.

• Natural areas stimulate us without effort, we do not have to concentrate, sounds are calming and colours help us to relax.

• This is known as “soft fascination” and relates to one of the leading theories: Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan and Kaplan)
Main issues for planning and design

• We want to encourage people to visit nature to improve their physical, mental and social well-being

• Natural environments are sensitive to pressures from too many visitors, so their capacity should be respected

• Design of facilities should emphasise the contrast between urban and nature

• Sites should not be over-developed
Levels of planning

- Strategic planning: higher level goals set in legal and policy frameworks.
- Territorial planning: translating strategic goals into spatially defined plans
- Operational planning: applying plans over time, managing areas, providing facilities.
The planning circle

natural & cultural environment
attractiveness / suitability
sensitivity

assessment

visitors
demand / activities
impact

recreation
infrastructure & supply
quality
impact
Territorial planning

• To match the pressure for different forms of activity to the capability of the landscape to accommodate it we can carry out a capacity assessment

• This balances the different sensitivities of the landscape to its suitability for activities

• We can use the tool of a landscape character assessment as the framework for this
TERRITORIAL PLANNING CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 1
CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 2
CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 3 ETC
CAPACITY PER LANDSCAPE CHARACTER UNIT (AVERAGE)
CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 1
CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 2
CAPACITY SPECIFICATION 3 ETC
TERRITORIAL PLANNING
SITE PLANNING AND DESIGN

DEMAND SIDE
VISITOR profiles
ACTIVITY TRENDS
DEMAND PROFILE
SEASONAL
MOTORISED/NON MOTORISED
ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL PRESSURE BY LCA UNIT
SUITABILITY PER LCA UNIT

SUPPLY SIDE
ECOLOGICAL
GEOPHYSICAL
AESTHETIC/SENSOR Y
CULTURAL
AVERAGE AND SPECIFIC SENSITIVITY BY LCA UNIT

GENERAL MODEL OF CAPACITY ASSESSMENT METHOD
Otepää, Winter capital of Estonia (in summer…)
Start of the ski-marathon through the Otepää landscape
Otepää Landscape Character Assessment

1. Fragmented forests and agriculture with wetland network
2. MOSAIC 1: Agricultural corridors in mixed forest stands
3. High density forests on rolling hills
4. MOSAIC 2: Fragmented agricultural land and mixed forest stands
5. Agriculture on rolling hills
6. Otepää Town and surrounding settlement
7. Kettlehole lakes and agricultural land on hillocks
8. High density forests on rolling hills
9. Agriculture on rolling hills
10. Large hillocks and valleys
11. Nüpli järv
12. Pühajärv and surrounding areas
13. Kettle hole lakes and expanding mixed forest stands
14. Steep forested hillocks with pastoral corridor
15. MOSAIC 2: Fragmented agricultural land and mixed forest stands
16. Agricultural valley and land use threshold
17. Forested hillocks and Kettle hole lake
18. Saksso Peat Bog
19. Medium Density Forest on Rolling Hills
20. Agricultural and transportation corridor
21. High density forests on rolling hills
22. MOSAIC 1: Agricultural corridors in mixed forest stands
23. Water body network on cultivated rolling hills
24. Hillocked lakeshores of Innõ järv
25. Large scale agricultural spaces
26. Medium Density Forest on Rolling Hills
27. Forest Reclamation area around Kassiratta
28. Pastoral hillocks with juvenile forest cover
29. MOSAIC 1: Agricultural corridors in mixed forest stands
30. MOSAIC 2: Fragmented agricultural land and mixed forest stands
31. Large Scale Arable Agriculture
Assessing sensitivity: supply side

- Consider the different aspects which may be affected by specific forms of recreation
- Ecological sensitivity – eg. disturbance, trampling of vegetation
- Geophysical – eg. erosion of soil, water pollution
- Aesthetic/sensory – eg. views, noise, crowding, facilities
- Cultural – eg. historical features, damage risk
- Consider weighting of more important aspects
The majority of character areas have ‘medium’ mean sensitivity. Areas of ‘low’ mean sensitivity are found in southerly areas, reflecting the dominance of agricultural land and limited presence of protected species, ecological management zones and cultural objects in the south. Areas of ‘high’ mean sensitivity are concentrated in central and northern areas where ecology is particularly rich and there are objects of cultural significance.
Assessing pressure: demand side

- Start with the suitability of each area for different forms of recreation
- Take account of what is there already
- What is the actual or potential demand?
- Who might the user groups/target market be?
- Assess the pressure according to different types of activity
Most areas have 'medium' mean pressure, probably thanks to the fact that many areas are well developed but not so open and maintained for tourism. The areas with low mean pressure are mainly on the eastern side of the municipality, two on the western side and one up on the north - all nearly the edges of the area. These areas are not so accessible, only with a few settlements and thus usually not in the larger of tourism, either. The areas of 'high' mean pressure are in the middle, around Chypaa town which is obviously the most developed part. There is one highly sensitive and well developed protected area on the south-east, also.
Assessing capacity

• Capacity is an interaction between sensitivity and pressure
• High sensitivity matched with high pressure leads to low capacity
• There may be differences in capacity according to different types of activity or seasons
Capacity for new development

It should be noted that in this study, capacity is primarily equated with capacity for new development and does not place judgement of the total capacity of an area to accept recreational development.

This has particular implications for areas labelled as 'low capacity' in that the area may have a high total capacity for recreation, but a low capacity for new development. As such, efforts in this area would be best focused on the maintenance or improvement of existing recreational facilities and infrastructure to sustain a quality experience for visiting and local populations.

Looking across different scales

To assess the capacity of an area for recreation and tourism, it is important to consider the area both in isolation and in relation to neighbouring areas: at a variety of scales.

To look in isolation, allows the reader to focus on specific features of the landscape, such as the presence of protected species, cultural objects or ecologically rich areas. This enables an in-depth understanding of locally occurring characteristics that may be valuable assets for recreation and tourism. To look at the wider context, and thus the relationship of one area to another, encourages the reader to evaluate the relative balance between development and conservation. That is, one must think about the concentration and dispersal of recreation and potential benefits or detriments that particular patterns of development may ensure. One must also think about how this capacity may change over time, and how best to manage the character of the area.

Following this understanding, our study assesses each character area individually and then looks at Cipanas at a whole.
DESIGN CONCEPTS
Key points for recreation design

• Reflect the character of the landscape and identify its Genus loci or spirit of place
• Use appropriate materials and forms of construction to fit that character and to be sustainable
• Enhance the contrast between urban and nature in all aspects of design
• Maximise accessibility and safety
Fox Glacier, New Zealand
DESIGNING THE VISIT

Providing the basic requirements for a visit, designed from the perspective of the visitor
In conclusion

• When approaching site design for outdoor recreation, think of it from a visitor’s perspective.
• We are putting elements into frequently beautiful and natural surroundings – let the landscape be itself and let us merely facilitate the recreational activities.
• Facilities help us to manage access and to reduce damage to the landscape.
Three useful references for recreation planning and design

1. Design for Outdoor Recreation
   Second Edition
   Simon Bell

2. European Forest Recreation and Tourism
   A Handbook

3. Management of Recreation and Nature Based Tourism in European Forests
   Edited by Simon Bell, Murray Simpson, Lisa Tyränen, Tuula Sievänen, Ulrike Probstl
The End

Simon.bell@emu.ee