

# 'Spiritual place-making' in urban landscapes

A photograph showing a traditional Chinese garden with a wooden pavilion in the foreground, surrounded by lush green trees. In the background, a modern high-rise apartment complex is visible, illustrating the contrast between traditional and modern urban landscapes.

Christopher D. Ives<sup>1</sup>, Jeremy Kidwell<sup>2</sup>, Nicole Porter<sup>3</sup> & Richard Irvine<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Geography, University of Nottingham. [chris.ives@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:chris.ives@nottingham.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Theology & Religion, University of Birmingham

<sup>3</sup>Department of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Nottingham

<sup>4</sup>Department of Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews

# Spiritual values have received little attention

## IPBES Summary Report (May 2019):

*“Nature underpins quality of life by providing basic life support for humanity (regulating), as well as material goods (material) and spiritual inspiration (non-material) (well established) {2.3.1, 2.3.2}.”*

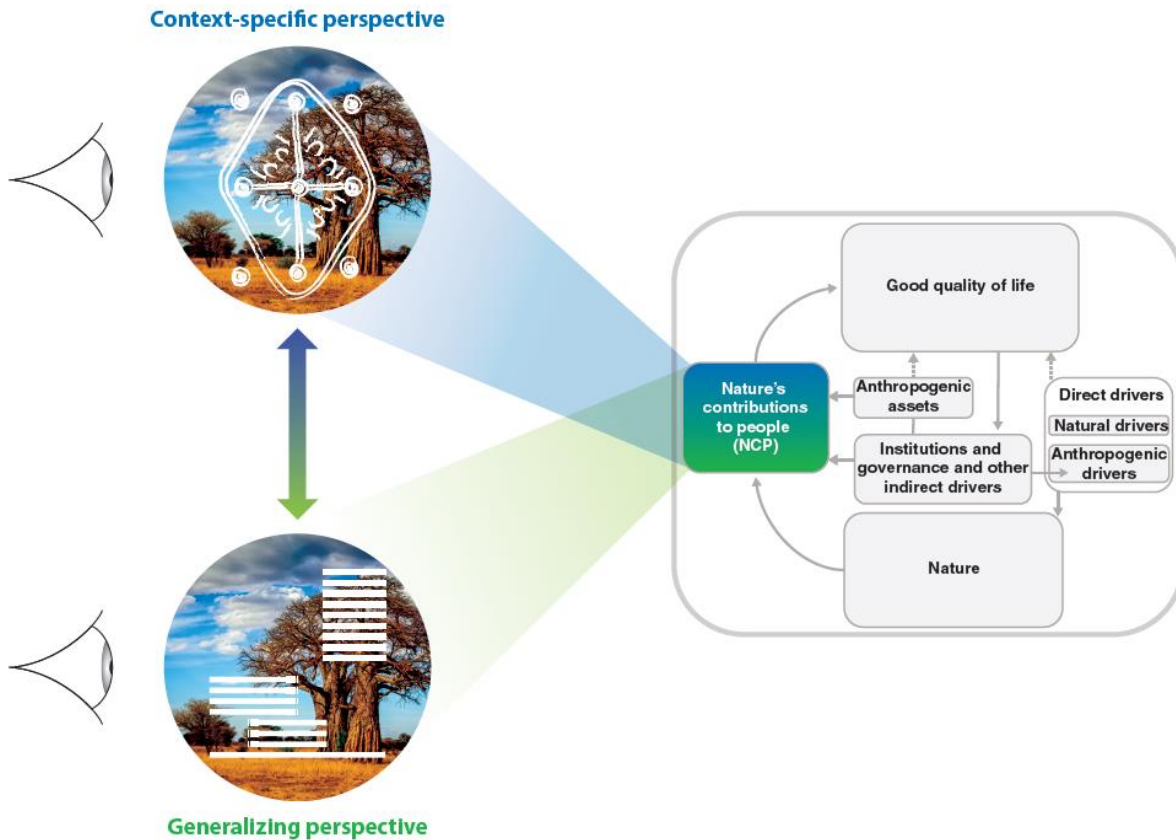
- **The concept of ‘Spiritual inspiration’ is not unpacked further.**
- **“Religion” received no mention.**

Scholars have recently called for greater research into **“human perception, values, and cultural traditions affecting the supply and demand of Ecosystem Services”**

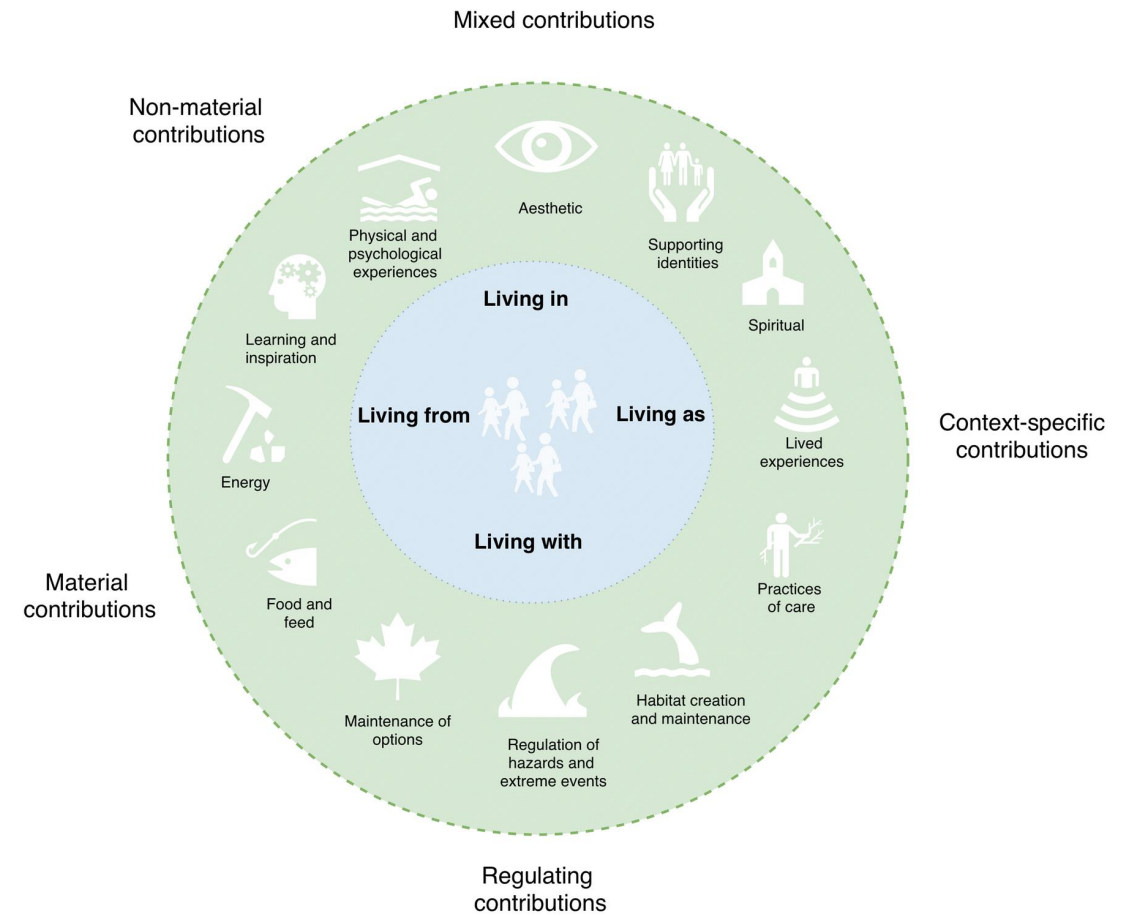
(McPhearson et al. 2015 *Ecosystem Services*, 12:152-156).

# Existing conceptual frameworks

## Nature's Contributions to People (IPBES)



## Life Framework of Values



# Research questions

1. How are cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, or religious values *perceived, conceptualised, or understood* in everyday urban environments?
2. What landscape features or socio-cultural influences shape the perception and expression of such values?
3. How can cultural, spiritual, aesthetic or religious values be categorised or operationalised for landscape decision-making?

There is a need for more empirically-grounded research.

# Case Study: Black Patch Park, Smethwick



## Geography

- Point of ecological confluence: meeting of watercourses
- ‘in-between’ place socially and administratively.
- Positioned on an administrative boundary

## Planning and Design

- Site currently being considered as focal-point for urban renewal and investment.
- Recent Sandwell planning statement and masterplan.



# Spiritual values: the great 'unknown'

**Table 1.1 Annual Value of Ecosystem Services provided by Birmingham's Green Infrastructure**

<i>Annual Values; 2011 Prices</i>		Woodland	Heathland	Wetland	BAP Priority Grassland	Total
Provisioning Services	Water Supply			£0.001m		£0.001m
	Wild Species Diversity	£0.25m	£0.19m	£0.10m	£0.03m	£0.56m
Cultural Services	Recreation	£1.42m	£0.65m	£0.10m	£0.10m	£10.05m
	Aesthetic Values & Sense of Place	£7.78m				
	Cultural Heritage & Spiritual Values					
Regulating Services	Flood Regulation	£0.76m	£0.10m	£0.10m	£0.01m	£0.98m
	Storm Buffering					
	Water Quality Regulation			£0.08m		£0.08m
<b>Σ</b>		<b>£10.20m</b>	<b>£0.94m</b>	<b>£0.38m</b>	<b>£0.14m</b>	<b>£11.66m</b>
Area of Habitat		1,528 ha	310 ha	199 ha	70 ha	2,107 ha
Average Value per Ha		£6,678	£3,034	£1,904	£2,005	£5,536
Notes: All values are 'best guess' estimates. Cells left blank can't be interpreted as 'no value', scientific evidence to date just doesn't allow to calculate a monetary value for these services. Not only because of that the real values may exceed the stated ones.						

# Signs of aesthetic, spiritual & cultural significance



This memorial commemorates the historical contribution made to Black Patch Park and the greater West Midlands area, by a community consisting of the Smith, Loveridge, Badger, Clayton, Scarer, Owen, Hill, Davies, Gorman and other Gypsy families. Under the leadership of the head man, (King) Esau and his wife, (Queen) Sentinia (Henty) Smith many hundreds of Romany Gypsies and nomadic people camped on this land from the mid 19th century until the evictions of July 26th 1905 and February 1906. Inadvertently their presence contributed to the preservation of this land as a space enabling the Black Patch Recreation ground to be created. The ground was officially opened on June 1906.

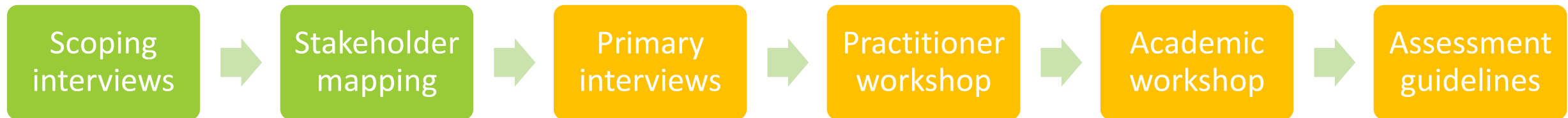
(Birmingham Romany Memorial)



*It's imperative to understand what was and what is (spiritually) if we are to imagine what could be...*

# Research Design

Diverse, interdisciplinary research team (geography, ethics, architecture, anthropology).



# Preliminary findings

## Themes

- *“It’s a very spiritual place [black patch park], but it is contested”*
- Spirituality is present, but not always formalised. Spiritual pluralism within groups (e.g. Friends of Black Patch Park)
- Natural features are identified as carrying spiritual significance (e.g. creeks).
- Some tension between planners and community members in how readily spiritual dimensions of this place are discussed.
- Combination of care & neglect.

# Emerging Questions

- (without priming by researchers) do respondents consider the park to have 'spiritual' value(s)?
- Are there barriers to spirituality that need to be overcome in formal planning contexts?
- Degrees of comfort in articulating spirituality. What *fora* can provide space for this?

# Thank you

Email: [chris.ives@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:chris.ives@nottingham.ac.uk)

Twitter: @DrChrisIves