Spiritual Values in Forest Management a Conceptual Framework for Empirical Research

Conference 'Religion and the Experience of Nature'

11 April 2021
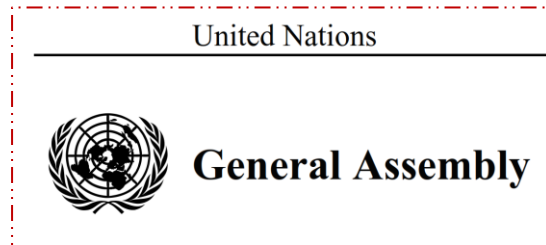
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How are spiritual values articulated in forest management?

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Global Policies:

Indigenous Peoples → Cultural & Spiritual values in governing documents

But in practice…?

Core concepts:

- Spiritual values of forests:

"hard-to define nature-based values that help maintain and renew the human and non-human spirit', characterized as 'hard to measure', 'intangible', 'ethereal', or 'psychologically deep' values associated with land" (After Driver et al. 1999; List and Brown 1999: 5)

Forest Management:

"human activities in forest ecosystems which are intended to achieve objectives with regard to the use and conservation of a specific forested area" (after Vellema and Maas 2003)

Sustainble Forest Management:

- Economic, Ecologic, and social functions
- Present & Future generations

(UN Gen. Assembly 2008)

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Growing recognition of spiritual values of forests / nature/ biodiversity

- Globalisation → growing interaction between perspectives on forests

- "People turn" in scientific forestry in the late 1970s → Community/Social/Participatory Forestry
- Biodiversity
- Climate
- Citizens' concern about forests:
  - Consumers – zero deforestation
  - Volunteers
  - Activist   → conflicts
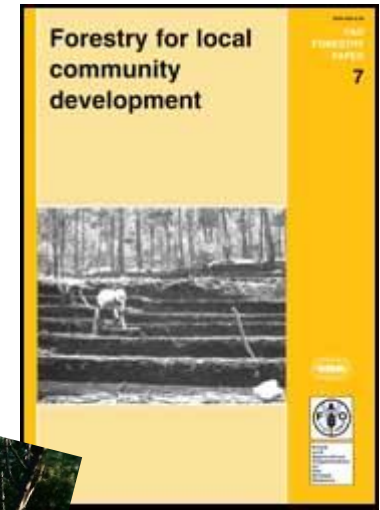
- Underlying: diverging worldviews & spiritual values

- Diversifying demands to forest managers:
  - Retreats, meditative walks, natural burial sites (in Europe)
  - Growing ethnic diversity sharing urban greenspace worldwide
  - Spiritual governance of sacred forests

Knowledge gaps in current research

COVID-19!

- Forest *managers* less studied than forest *users*

- Most *empirical* studies in the Western world
- Only part focused on forests

- Spiritual experiences in nature & behaviour: complex relationship
- Spirituality -?- Nature restoration -+- Health?
- Connection to land - Place attachment/identity – spirituality?

→ *How to study?*   → *Conceptual framework*

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Building the framework:
Approach, Components, Design

- **Approach**: 'Family resemblance approach' (Taylor 2016):

  > "the multifarious dimensions of religious experience [...] without establishing definitively where the boundary lies between 'religion' and whatever is *not* religion *(Saler 1993)"*.

  - No preference of one spiritual tradition above another

  - No sharp distinction between 'spiritual' and 'religous'

  - Focuses on explanatory power

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Building the Framework: Components

1. Categories of spirituality
2. Categories of study object, e.g. forest management

Ninian Smart:

7 Dimensions of Religion
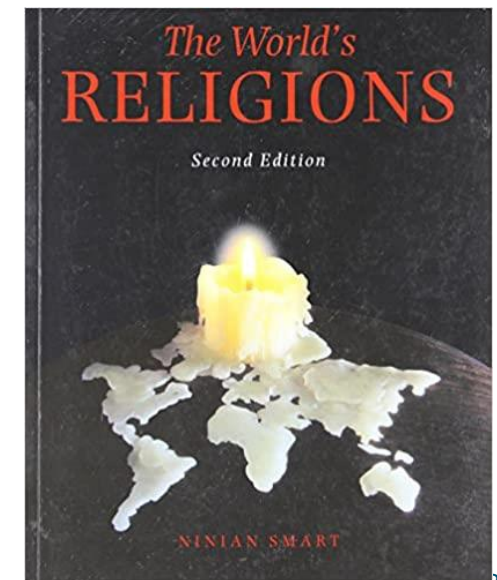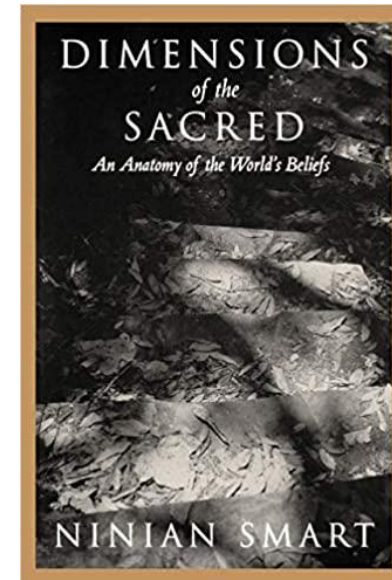
Ninian Smart's 7 Dimensions of Religion

1. Emotional and experiential

2. Practical or ritual

3. Narrative or mythical

4. Doctrinal and philosophical

5. Ethical and legal

6. Social and institutional

7. Material

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Dimensions of Spirituality and Forests/Nature

1. Experiential - aesthetical

2. Experiential – relational

3. Experiential – restorative

4. Experiential – 'life force' (energy)

5. Practical or ritual

6. Narrative or mythical
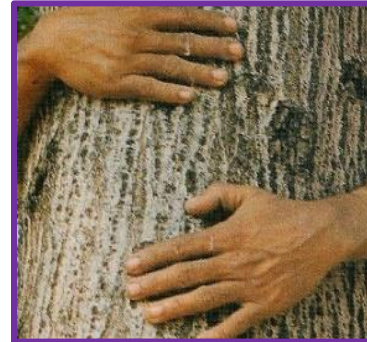
7. Philosophi-cal & ethical

8. Social and institutional

9. Material-Spiritual

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Building the Framework: Design - Matrix
Example: Spiritual Dimensions in Forest Management Plans

Abstract ↓ ... Concrete

Dimensions →→→ ↓ Management Elements	D1. Exp-Aesth	D2. Exp-Rel	D3. Exp-Resto-rative	D4. Exp-life force	D5. Pract-Ritual	D6. Myth-Narr	D7. Phil-Eth	D8. Mat'l-spirit'l	Total	
Op.1.1. Descriptive – what is										
Op.1.2. Descr.iptive – Use										
Op.1.3. Governance Context										
Op.2.1. Problems / Threats										
Op.2.2. Objectives, Principles, Guidelines										
Op.2.3. Priorities										
Op.3. Zoning, Inventories										
Op.4.1. Interv. Protection										
Op.4.2. Interv. Integr'd Use & Restoration										
Op.4.3. Interv. Communic, Education & Research										
Op.4.4. Interv. Nature tourism										
Total										
%										

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# Application to empirical studies: started & underway

1. Articulation of spiritual values in Forest management *plans*

2. Articulation of spiritual values in forest management *practices*?

3. Articulation of spiritual values in the management of 'spiritually inspired' forest estates

4. Cycling tourists' spiritual experiences in the Harz

5. Etc.

Further possible applications:

Systematize evidence and contribute to theorizing in:

- Cultural & Spiritual Values in Nature Conservation
- Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge
- Community-based forestry with local & Indigenous Pp.
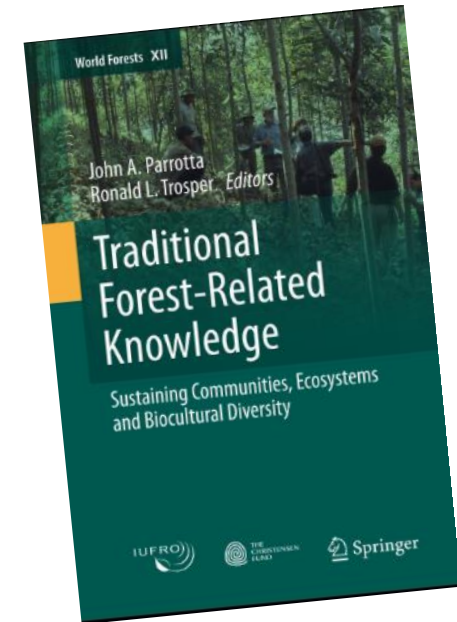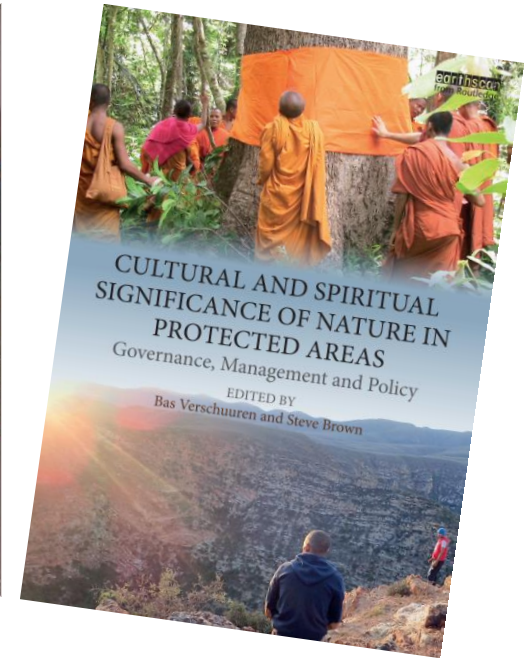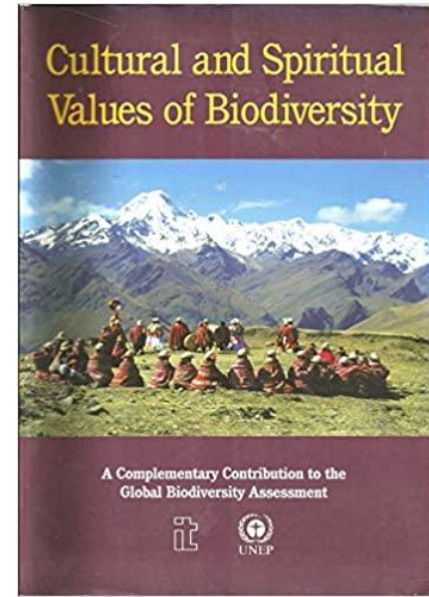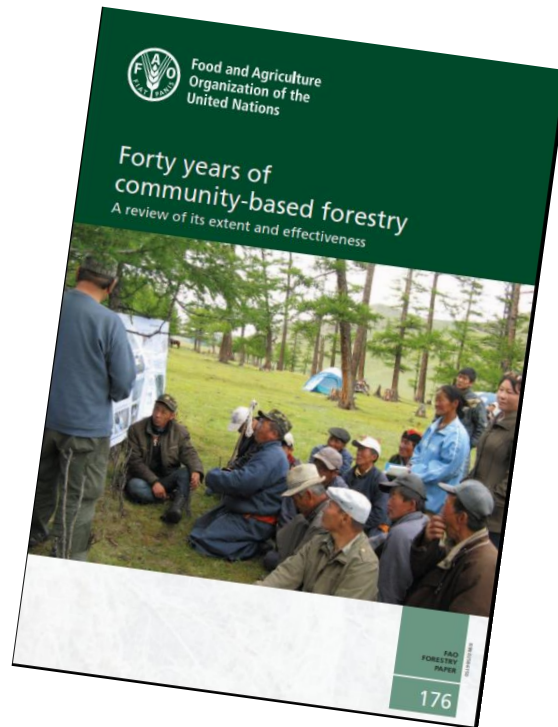
Further possible applications (2)

- Systematic approach for further study of role of spiritual experiences in:

  - people's connection with nature,

  - nature-induced health restoration,

  - people's connection with land and 'sense of place',

  - the role of rituals and narratives in sustainable forest management, and

  - worldviews (ontologies and epistemologies) relevant to forest management.

- Spiritualities and religions beneficial or detrimental to nature conservation (Lynn White)

→ Add the perspective of those engaged with forest management.
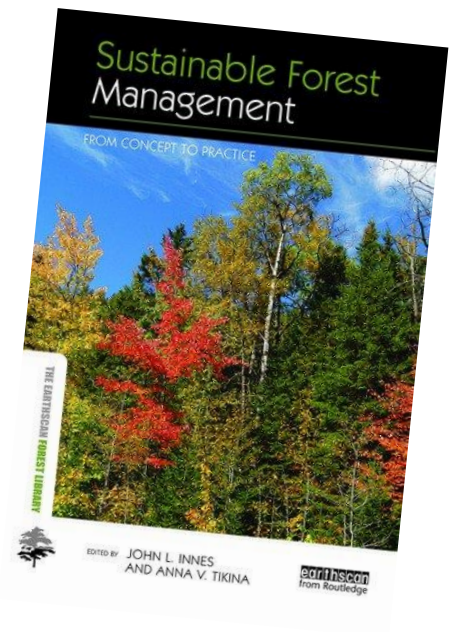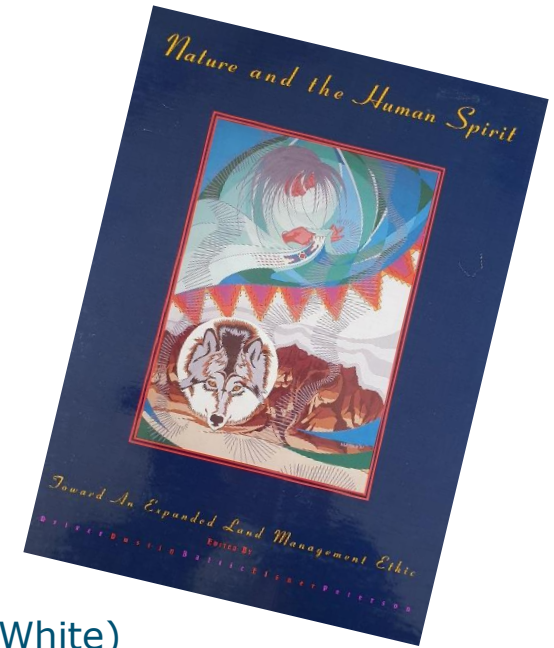
Sensitivities and limits

- Not cast in stone, adapt to scope & questions of research

- Scope focused on forest (& nature) management – for broader domains other frameworks may be better (e.g. MEA, IPBES)

- Boundary between spiritual and not spiritual = grey area

- 'Packaging' of terms:

  > *In policy literature:*
  > Cultural, socio-cultural, cultural-historical, cultural heritage, aesthetic/spiritual, social;
  >
  > *In relation to the natural world:*
  > Cultural landscapes, cultural benefits, shared values of ecosystems;
  >
  > *Inclusive concepts:*
  > Biocultural diversity
  > Relational values

- Treat spiritual values with respect

Thank You!

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