

For Phil Day  
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## VALUING GREEN SPACE

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The preservation of green space within urban areas is a universally endorsed objective, whether it be bushland or waterways, formal city and suburban parks, or pockets within medium density inner urban development in places like West End or New Farm. The actual location of public and private green space can be determined by the town planning system, for example by zoning, or by dedication as a condition of subdivisional approval. Or it can simply be publicly acquired - if the price isn't too high.

The quantity of green space will effectively depend upon the value the body politic places on it relative to the cost of acquiring (and maintaining) it, or the revenue forgone by not using green space for more valuable alternative uses.

The assumption therefore is that green space can be valued. And, although they involve some subjective considerations, most of the component values of green space can indeed be measured fairly convincingly. For example, its aesthetic value and its contribution to good urban design, its leisure and recreational value, and its value as a tourist attraction.

But, as an argument for acquiring or preserving it, can the intrinsic ecological value of green space be measured?

I think not, for the reasons persuasively spelt out by Carla Catterall. An inductive process which attempts to identify discrete elements of green space is unrealistic. It's an interesting challenge, but it's not only virtually impossible, at least in the present state of ecological knowledge. I would argue that it's also misconceived - because it involves trying to assess the value of natural

(in her third para)

resources in the context of values attributable to man-made activities. In other words, it's an oranges and lemons comparison.

Our efforts would be better directed to winding back some of the consequences - dating from the later Middle Ages - of treating land and other natural resources like man-made commodities to be privately owned and dealt with and traded for profit.

The simplest and most striking example of one of the consequences is ubiquitously manifested in the daily conduct of urban development. A fatally flawed town planning system allows the unearned increment in land value accruing from public planning approvals to be privately appropriated, whether or not actual development takes place. Whatever its environmental or ecological significance, all land is thus vulnerable to development pressures - irrespective of genuine community need and market demand.

whether or not the true ecological value of land or other natural resources can be meaningfully calculated, what we certainly can do is ensure that the unearned increments in the market value of land are claimed on behalf of the community and do not continue to be a standing invitation to "develop" irrespective of need. It doesn't mean land nationalisation or the abolition of freehold title, but it does mean capturing, not the legitimate profits from actual development, but the unearned increments in land value created by community decisions.