



## FACTSHEET

# Ecosystem Service: Aesthetic appreciation and inspiration for culture, art and design

## In a nutshell

Many people enjoy the beauty of natural landscapes and are fascinated by animals, plants and ecosystems. Nature has also been the source of inspiration for much of our art and culture as well as for technological innovations.

### 1. Role for human well-being

The aesthetic value of natural landscapes has inspired culture, art and design in all parts of the world. Natural motifs play a prominent part in national emblems, paintings, music and literature. Language, knowledge and the natural environment have been intimately related throughout human history. Today, science and the smart design of products and architecture are increasingly inspired by the aesthetics and functionality of nature. Certain aspects of environmental education can also be linked with this ecosystem service and with other cultural ecosystem services.

### 2. Typical threats

Changes in land use and degradation caused by unsustainable land use reduce the attractiveness and scenic beauty of a natural area. They also compromise the environmental conditions that are crucial for all cultural ecosystem services.

Cultural landscapes are especially vulnerable to social and economic changes and loss of traditional knowledge. Many world heritage sites, e.g. the [Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras](#), reflect a harmonious relationship between humankind and the natural environment and are of great aesthetic appeal. The Philippine rice terraces have been created by more than a thousand generations of local small-scale farmers. Due to rapid socio-economic changes, traditional land use patterns are being lost, resulting in degradation, conversion or the abandonment of cultural landscapes.

### 3. Example indicators

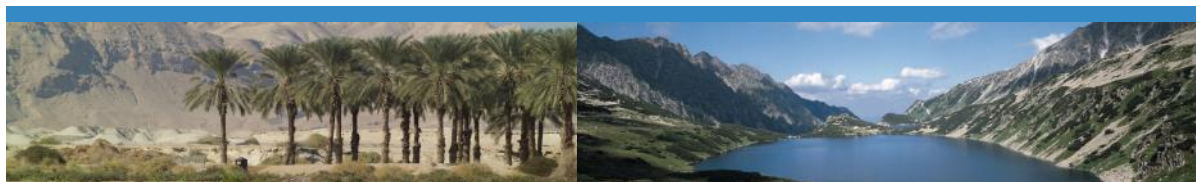
Different indicators shed light on different aspects:

- Number of scenic sites or distance between human habitations to landscape in an attractive condition.
- Database of handicrafts or other arts products based on nature.
- Public recognition of and support for traditional land use practices in cultural landscapes, as expressed in programmes, subsidies, communications, regulations.
- The indicator [VITEK - Vitality Index of Traditional Knowledge](#) has been developed for measuring the vitality of traditional environmental knowledge across generations in e.g. local communities.
- The indicator [status and trends of linguistic diversity and numbers of speakers of indigenous languages](#) helps towards an improved understanding of the links between land use changes and loss of local/regional culture.





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#### 4. Example methods

As with the ecosystem service 'spiritual inspiration', 'aesthetic appreciation' should first be described in qualitative terms prior to any attempts to quantify its components. A qualitative description reveals the different facets of the cultural service and enables the integration of perhaps very different aspects important to the relevant groups. A major challenge to properly identifying and assessing cultural values is a Western perspective and related concepts (including the notion of ecosystem services itself), which may not necessarily capture the essence of value for local communities, including indigenous people.

A qualitative assessment can be conducted by means of semi-structured [interviews](#), [focus groups](#), [mapping exercises](#) or [anthropological field methods](#). To assess aesthetic inspiration, it should be clear how a given cultural expression is linked to a landscape, species or natural phenomenon.

Another approach is to ask participants directly to voice their aesthetic appreciation for specific sites or natural characteristics. This could be done by using questionnaires or structured interviews with local people/visitors. For initial scoping, one could ask:

- Which landscapes or places are most beautiful to you?
- What are beautiful landscape features and land cover forms?
- Where in your community do you enjoy the beauty of the landscape?

To **assess the economic value** of this ecosystem service, participants have been asked to articulate their appreciation by means of quantitative methods, e.g.:

- [Participatory economic valuation methods](#)
- [Travel cost method](#)
- [Contingent valuation](#)
- Ranking methods e.g. [Social valuation of ecosystem services](#)
- [Quantifying and mapping cultural ecosystem services](#) at community level can be done by combining various methods.

For further information regarding the challenges involved in measuring cultural services, see [TEEB Ecological & Economic Foundation Ch. 3 p. 24 & 32](#) (p. 131 & 137 in book version).

For a review of the current state of knowledge about measuring cultural services, see the article [Contributions of cultural services to the ecosystem services agenda](#) by Daniels et al. 2012.

#### 5. Managing this service

There are no specific measures for managing 'aesthetic inspiration', as this service is part of a more integrated socio-ecological perspective on ecosystems. For resources on the role of this ecosystem service and the way it is related to management issues, see for example:

- [The global bio-cultural conservation sourcebook](#)
- [Resource Manuals for World Heritage Sites](#)
- [Terralingua - Unity in Biocultural Diversity](#)

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