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EDITORIAL

Special issue on pastoral landscapes caught between abandonment, rewilding and agro-environmental management. Is there an alternative future?

Pastoral landscapes are mostly located in agriculturally marginalised areas such as mountain uplands or sandy heathlands. For this reason they have usually not undergone the processes of intensification, enclosure and specialisation characteristic of urbanised core agricultural areas, and as a result they often involve complex forms of agriculture that spatially and temporally interweave grazing, cultivation (e.g. fodder) and extensive agro-forestry (e.g. fruit and nuts). They are therefore also often linked to customary ways of life and agricultural practices such as commoning and other collective activities that do not serve exclusively economic profit motives. Pastoral landscapes as forms of cultural practices often produce and conserve biologically diverse and unique environments. Unfortunately, however, the economic marginalisation of these pastoral areas means that they have become vulnerable to depopulation and abandonment due to poor social and physical infrastructure (schools, roads), and have become co-dependent on supplementary economic activities (construction, food processing).

One visible sign of abandonment is that the rich and diverse ecological heritage of cultural landscapes, created over the centuries, is lost to an encroaching bush undergrowth and scrub forest, that some regard as 'rewilding', but which many locals and ecologists alike regard to be a form of degradation rather than a return to an earlier pristine wild state. Natural processes of change cannot simply be reversed (Nogués-Bravo, Simberloff, Rahbek, & Sanders, 2016). This change in flora (and fauna) is an aberrance to the local population, and a symbol of its homeland's demise, at the same time as, ironically, it might be perceived as attractive pure nature, even wilderness, to the outsider, especially when compared to the built-up environments of the core areas where they live. The outsider's misconception, furthermore, goes hand in hand with many environmentalists' love for the protection and production of wilderness as a radical antidote to profit-driven unhindered development. As a tragic consequence, alternative ways of life get lost and pastoral landscapes are made invisible, as in national parks and 'wilderness areas' in the United States, where their cultural history is denied and getting lost (Olwig, 1996). This 'misreading' (Fairhead & Leach, 1996) of these marginalised landscapes, in turn, legitimates a polarising, binary 'protection' of these 'nature' areas that involves 'protecting' them from local human use through environmental management and rewilding, while, at the same time, setting them aside for the aesthetic or recreational enjoyment of populations from the core areas.

Environmental management can be problematic if it is organisationally top down, centralised and standardised, especially as it is often rooted in the landscape perceptions and organisational structures of the core areas where it is based. The management process then can have the effect of furthering the abandonment of the land and the attendant processes of environmental deterioration. This occurs for example when inappropriate restrictions are placed on customary land use that are coupled with drastic re-wilding strategies (such as the re-introduction of long extinct, now-exotic and invasive carnivores). This deterioration is further fostered when supplementary economic activities are hindered and when competition for infrastructure and property with wealthier recreational consumers from core areas makes the local population's low income and subsistence livelihoods unviable. These issues are compounded, moreover, by the fact that these marginal forms of agriculture mesh poorly with the large-scale specialised and globalised

ambitions of core-area agri-business, agricultural policy and management practice. As a result, grazing landscapes easily fall between the cracks of agricultural, food and environmental policy and support schemes and this contributes further to their abandonment and intentional, or non-intentional, transformation into man-made wilderness with the consequent loss of their cultural and biological heritage. These processes can also go hand in hand with the quantification and scientification of spatial, environmental and conservation planning, with the result that the role of those who inhabited and created these landscapes, and their customary practices, is overlooked because it is difficult to quantify. Thus, the demise of pastoral landscapes can also mean a loss of alternative ways of life that differ from the monoculture associated with agri-business, which tends to favour individual ownership over the community management of commoning. Seen from this perspective, pastoral landscapes are not only in need of alternative futures between abandonment and agro-environmental management, they also hold a promise for alternative futures concerning the relations between individuals, communities and their environment more generally.

Alternative futures

This special issue will ask if there are alternative futures, and how such futures might be able to build upon, and strengthen, the cultural landscapes and biological diversity of these regions, while at the same time helping to meet the recreational and cultural needs of the urbanised core. The articles in the issue contribute to this search for alternative futures through studies of pastoral areas that are experiencing abandonment and rewilding, but which, at the same time, have strengths that can point the way to more enlightened forms of landscape governance, and the revitalization of marginalised pastoral landscapes. The search for alternative futures for pastoral landscapes cannot be separated from the search for alternative ways and possibilities of life in what Anna Tsing (2015) calls the 'ruins' of a society and an economy that has brought us the Anthropocene.

The contributions examine two key aspects of the need for alternative futures and the possibility of attaining them. On the one hand there is the question of the positive or negative role of (trans-)national environmental governance in maintaining pastoral landscapes and their biodiversity. On the other hand there are the conflicting interests of the local population, and the potential alternative futures engrained in these pastoral landscapes and those that dwell in them. Both aspects of the search for alternative futures can be seen, in our opinion, to be closely related if the meaning of landscape is shifted from referring to an abstract area on a map to meaning a form of practice. This becomes especially clear in the case of the landscapes of the Alps.

The origin and argument of the articles

The special issue has its origins in a session at the September 2016 *Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape* (PECSRL)[1] on the theme of 'Mountains, uplands, lowlands. European landscapes from an altitudinal perspective'. The conference took place in both Innsbruck and the village of Seefeld in the Tyrolean Austrian Alps, and several of the articles in this issue are concerned with different regions of the Alps. The 'Alps' are partly defined in the dictionary as a chain of mountains (NOAD, 2005: alps), and the word 'Alp' logically, as the singular of 'Alps,' should thus be a single mountain in the chain. This, however, is not the sole meaning of 'Alp.' The generic sense of Alp is 'a high mountain, especially a snowcapped one', but the dictionary also offers a more cultural geographically specific alternative: '(in Switzerland) an area of green pasture on a mountainside'. Actually, this sense of alp is found not only in Switzerland, but in other countries of the alpine region including Germany, where it is sometimes spelled (and capitalised) *Alb* or *Alm*. If the root of the word 'alps' is the native alpine term *Alp/Alm* meaning a pasture on a mountain*side*, then, in the plural, the 'alps' refers not so much to a generic chain of 'natural' white *topped*

mountain physical landscapes, as to a web of mountain *side* meadow cultural landscapes. The difference is significant because it cuts across a major chasm in the perception and use of the landscape of the Alps (and other comparable regions) that is key to this special issue. This is the chasm between the generic physical meaning attributed by science to topographical spatial forms, and the particular symbolic and cultural meaning attached by local people to distinct places, such as meadowlands, that constitute the landscapes of the earth as a cultural landscape, and a human abode.

In one context, in a tradition going back to the rise of Enlightenment science and sublime aesthetics, the Alps are a chain of mountains that are of interest both as scientific objects due to their height and their glaciers, and as wild (raw) sublime 'natural' phenomena, with a challenging 'northern' climate, to be climbed and conquered by 'Man' as well as Science (Cronon 1996; Olwig, 1996). This is a topic addressed by anthropologist Werner Krauß in his article, 'Alpine landscapes in the Anthropocene: alternative common futures'. Krauß however, also examines the history of the ethnography of the Alps on the basis of anthropological participant observation, which means he both resided in the area as an active participant in its social and economic life, and observed alpine society from an anthropological perspective. He traces here a shift from a view of the Alpine natives as an heroic folk shaped by their rugged, Nordic-like, wild mountain environment—a view that was favoured by the fascists (it was no accident that Hitler's Eagle's Nest was located on an Alpine peak) (see also Olwig, 2017)—to a perception of the people as the vulnerable inhabitants of a peripheral part of Europe whose meadows are susceptible to abandonment due to pressures exerted by dominant core economies.

Though the dramatic contrast between the barren white peaks of the Alps and the lush pastures of the *Alp/Alb* pastures is particularly notable in the Alps in Europe, the conflicts found in the Alps are also found elsewhere in Europe, and the world. Moving somewhat further downhill from an altitudinal perspective Kenneth R. Olwig, in his essay 'England's "Lake District" and the "North Atlantic Archipelago": A body of managed land contra a body politic', examines this divide between economic and social core areas and their pastoral periphery. From a long-term historical geographical perspective he shows how landscape is transformed from being a body politic shaping the land in its image (e.g. as an *Alp* or *Alm*) to being a material physical geographical body (e.g. the alp as a mountain peak). The abandonment of these pastures and their rewilding suits the interests of the wilderness recreation industry, rewilding enthusiasts, economic planners and agro-environmental managers. This is because they tend to favour the environmental and economic efficiency of dividing the landscape into, on the one hand, peripheral areas where pure nature preservation is concentrated on the margins of agricultural viability, and, on the other hand, core areas where large scale 'efficient' agricultural enterprises can be concentrated (Olwig, 2016). It makes a difference, however, whether a region has been incorporated fully into the economic and political sphere of a central state, as is the case with the Lake District, or whether, like the Faeroe Islands, it has self-rule. Conflicts concerning pastoral landscape are a permanent reminder that transhumance practices still seem to undermine enclosure and thereby the fixed order of things.

Further down, altitudinally, the Dutch landscape and food consultant, Martin Woestenburg, in his article, 'Heathland Farm as a new commons?' shows how the same divisive issues apply to the lowest lands in Europe. He demonstrates furthermore, using the example of the Dutch heathland farms, that there is a viable alternative future to standardised foods and monotonous landscapes produced by agri-business. The alternative future involves new approaches to pastoral commoning, coupled with a revived interest in the quality and diversity of both the landscape and foods produced by small-scale pastoralists. The future chosen is a question of attitude rather than altitude.

The general contours of questions raised in these articles are not exclusive to Europe. In his essay 'Biodiversity, livelihoods and struggles over sustainability in Nepal', anthropologist Ben Campbell describes the long-term struggle of Langtang pastoralists in the Himalayas with diverse regimes of environmentalism. He traces the on-going conflicts between nature conservation and

the customary practices of the indigenous community, with climate change as a new discursive regime that again separates culture from nature. Campbell's insights are based on ethnographic scrutiny and long-term participant observation over a time span of decades; his paper 'tracks the yo-yo oscillations of national and international policy, and considers the abilities of indigenous people, their animals and their gods, to carry on regardless; and what we can learn from them'. But what if there are no people left who want to live 'with the land' and 'with the animals', as Campbell puts it? Science-based environmentalism and nature conservation play here a vital role when it comes to reviving pastoral landscapes.

One of the factors working to help provide a viable alternative future in the economically marginal areas of Europe with an historically strong tradition for pastoralism is that there is an increasing awareness of the biodiversity value of grasslands. In their contribution, 'Among rewilding mountains: grassland conservation and abandoned settlements in the Northern Apennines' the geographers Andreas Haller and Oliver Bender provide an empirical, fieldwork based, assessment of recent attempts to reverse the process of pasture abandonment. They leave no doubt that in the Italian regions of Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna the rich biodiversity of grazing landscapes, that were once the result of agricultural activities, today depends on the efforts of biodiversity conservation. In the long run, the only way to maintain these grazing landscapes is through the inclusion of the local communities and the valorisation of local products.

Attempts to maintain the cultural landscape, by contrast, are at the focus of the case study of the Slovenian landscape architects, Nadja Penko Seidla and Mojca Golobičb, 'The effects of EU policies on preserving cultural landscape in the Alps'. Here, they have examined ways that European level policies concerned with the cultural landscape have actually impacted Alpine areas. Though these policies have met with some success, the problem with such centrally directed efforts is that they can lead to standardised landscapes, lacking local diversity and there is some evidence that this is occurring.

The two final articles examine mountainous areas of France and Trentino where more locally based agro-environmental governance has played a stronger role in creating an alternative future enabling the cultural landscape to be shaped by living communities, thus countering the forces leading to abandonment and rewilding. Yves Michelin and Christine Montoloy, a geographer and a conservationist, in their article, 'Why public policies face difficulties in protecting mountain pastoral landscapes: Some lessons from the history of the volcanic landscape of the Chaîne des Puys/ Limagne fault, France', focus on an area where French agro-environmental authorities have recently worked to devolve management through the creation of 'natural regional parks'. This shift allows for regional cultural identity, history and landscape to come to the fore in relation to the more uniform criteria that tend to characterise natural science-based management. Based on years of historical study and contemporary experience anchored in the region, they propose a general framework that can help provide an alternative future for similar areas by supporting effective policies suitable to mountain grazing landscapes that recognises both the history of top down control, as with regard to forestry, while enjoying the support of local communities through its recognition of local commoning custom.

In their article, 'Governing mountain landscapes collectively: Local responses to emerging challenges within a system thinking perspective', the three Italian/Trentino researchers, Alessandro Gretter, Marco Ciolli, and Rocco Scolozzi, report from the region of Trentino, which, like the adjacent Tyrol, has considerable political autonomy, a multi-ethnic population and a notably vibrant economy. There is a remarkable difference between areas of depopulation and abandonment of customary pastoral practices and areas where this trend is less prevalent. Gretter, Ciolli and Scolozzi provide evidence that in, for example, the Autonomous province of Trentino historically evolved institutions serve as a viable basis to meet the challenges of external pressures better than the communities that are subjugated to an external, central socio-economic political

authority. They suggest that through close collaboration between researchers, policy makers, land managers, agriculturalists and suppliers, complex ecological systems can be maintained.

Conclusion

Pastoral landscapes in economically marginal areas are caught between abandonment, rewilding and agro-environmental management. A key issue, as the articles in this special issue show, is the degree to which a landscape is perceived to be (wild) nature or a cultural landscape, as in the case of the Alps considered either to be constituted by snowy mountain peaks, or as a landscape in which nature has been transformed by sustainable human use, as with the *Alp/Alb* meadowlands. Many of the articles show that there are viable alternative futures for such pastoral landscapes, especially in regions which have a degree of political and economic autonomy and where a strong sense of local participation prevails (see also Krauß, 2008). This is the case, for example, in the Netherlands that has a decentralised federal system that preserves some of the regional self-government characteristic of the historical Dutch *landschap* (Mels, 2005). It is also the case in the relatively autonomous regions of Trentino and Tyrol that have developed on the margins between nation states, and the Faeroe Islands, whose geographical and cultural separation from Denmark has provided a basis for self-rule. The Swiss cantons and the German federal system also allow for some regional autonomy, though at a larger scale, and even in France, with its long tradition of central rule now allows for the development of regional parks in which the local cultural landscape, rather than national wilderness nature ideals, increasingly predominate. *The European Union's* principle of the devolution of power likewise creates a presumed space for local input, especially when coupled to the ideals of the *European Landscape Convention*, promulgated by the *Council of Europe*, which defines landscape as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' (Europe 2000). This special issue argues that alternative futures to abandonment, rewilding and environmental management necessitate more than science-based planning. It requires, rather, a political ecology deeply rooted in democratic processes and cultural understanding, and, as Ben Campbell reminds us, an approach focusing on the people who want to live *with* the land and *with* the animals.

Note

1. This venerable bi-annual, interdisciplinary, conference today excludes neither non-European nor urban landscape research, but the name of the conference persists, as befitting a 'permanent' conference now known principally by its tongue twisting initials PECSRL (http://www.pecsrl.org).

Disclosure statement

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