



Geography & Environment, School of Geosciences
GG3052/GG3573/GG3574: RESEARCH DESIGN

Assignment 3b: Contested landscapes of rural Scotland

Aim

- To use qualitative techniques to investigate/demonstrate different attitudes towards the landscapes of rural Scotland

Introduction

The geography of rural Scotland is complex – and extends to include much more than the material features of the landscape. Aspects of the rural landscape are often highly subjective, at either a personal or a collective social/cultural level. Different people or different groups attach different, sometimes contradictory, meanings to the same areas, and make use of these areas in different ways – hence *contested* landscapes. To grasp the variety and subtleties of interpretation requires qualitative methods. Particular arguments (substance) are made in particular ways (style). ‘Texts’ – whether, words, pictures, music, etc. – are *partial* twice over, in that their accounts of phenomena are neither neutral nor complete. Authors use words and pictures as tools that reinforce, or even create, meanings such as the ‘sense of place’ that we [are led to] attach to particular locations. Cultural geographers, and other researchers influenced by post-positivist approaches, work with concepts such as *social construction or representation* to investigate these attitudes towards landscape that involve more than objective reality. For example, consider this:

When we look at a landscape, we do not see what is there, but largely what we think is there. We attribute qualities to a landscape which it does not intrinsically possess – savageness for example, or bleakness – and we value it accordingly. We *read* landscapes... in the light of our own experience and memory, and that of our shared cultural memory. Although people have traditionally gone into wild places in some way to escape culture or convention, they have, in fact, perceived... that wilderness, as just about everything is perceived, through a filter of associations. William Blake put his finger on the truth. “The tree,” he wrote, “that moves some to tears of joy is, in the eyes of others, only a green thing that stands in the way.”

ROBERT MACFARLANE
Mountains of the Mind (2003, p. 18)

The way different stakeholders imagine – and consequently act towards – rural Scotland is of major importance to social and economic activity. Topics of current interest because of their controversial aspects include:

- land ownership and access
- leisure, tourism and (sustainable?) development
- wildlife/natural heritage – biodiversity, conservation + ecological value
- scenic value
- ideas of the ‘wild’, wilderness – psychological + spiritual value
- identity, cultural history, heritage and authenticity
- place-marketing: branding + commodification of the natural and cultural environment (e.g., see Hopkins, 1998, reference below)
- energy resources
- different models of rural development
- conflicts between community interests and corporate power

Note that these often intersect! Thus locals, multinational corporations, politicians, environmental activists, Munro-baggers, adventure tourists, artists, patrons of *Highland Heritage* coach tours, etc. all bring their own perspectives to Scotland’s outdoors. These perspectives are evident – although not necessarily

in straightforward ways – in a range of textual sources that promote partial views of rural... remote... wild... etc... landscapes. **The purpose of this assignment is to ‘decode’ some of these texts to tease out some of the various meanings attached to Scotland’s rural landscapes.**

For a little bit of theory about different versions of the rural, Lorna recommends:

Halfacree, K. 2006. Rural space: constructing a three-fold architecture. In: P. Cloke, T. Marsden and P. H. Mooney (eds). *SAGE Handbook of Rural Studies*. London, SAGE, pp. 344-62.

Nick also likes the ‘narratives of rural change’ set out in the first part of:

Brown, D. L. and M. Shucksmith. 2016. A news lens for examining rural change. *European Countryside*, 2, pp. 183-188. [These authors identify six different stories told about the countryside. Think how these might be represented, in words and pictures, by different actors. You might identify other narratives to write about. See also Table 4.1 of Halfacree (2006), as above.]

and

Hopkins, J. 1998. Signs of the post-rural: marketing myths of a symbolic countryside. *Geografiska Annaler*, Series B, 80, 2, pp 65-81.

I like this because it addresses qualitative methods, examines their wider relationship to post-positivist and post-modernist approaches, is not too difficult or obscure, is available from JSTOR, and provides a useful case study of the different ways in which rural areas adjacent to Lake Huron are represented.

* * *

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO – in ~2,000 words + illustrations, tables, etc., if appropriate

- First, establish your focus! Pick a theme or theme(s) and/or some place/region to study. [See tips + sources, below.] Your choices must provide sufficient variety in terms of subject matter, source material and different points of view to allow you to address the contested landscapes brief effectively, but should not be so wide that your task becomes unmanageable.
- The task itself... **Using ‘textual’ sources and methods of your choice** (documents, images, websites, etc.) **examine how different meanings of rural Scotland are produced and consumed by different stakeholders.**

Your discussion should:

- demonstrate the use of appropriate methods of textual analysis to interpret written and visual secondary source materials portraying aspects of Scotland’s outdoors environment;
- consider, with specific reference to appropriate evidence, the extent to which rural Scotland is a ‘contested’ landscape (i.e., subject to alternative uses/given different or contradictory meanings).

As you analyse your choice of sources, you should bear in mind (see Morin, 2003, p. 324 and Doel, 2003, p. 509):

- who produced the material, and for whom? This requires you to consider the *contexts* of authorship (representation) and audience (interpretation);
- the rhetoric (i.e., the choice of language – e.g., adjectives, metaphors, figures of speech, etc. – and imagery) used in the text to convey (or encode) particular meanings; and
- the way(s) in which this rhetoric is intended to convince readers that the particular vision portrayed is that of the ‘natural’ order of things.¹

¹ The key point here is that, as a critically-aware, academically-trained geographer, you should read the text with rather more scepticism than that sector of the ‘public’ for which it was originally intended...

Tips

- You cannot cover all of this. Stick to one theme, or two at most or three cross-cutting themes, or pick one particular place/area, and examine the different claims made for it. Some suggestions, which you are welcome to use:
 - wild versus working landscapes
 - different types of tourist landscape/experience
 - different representations of say, the Cairngorms or Orkney or the Borders
 - preservation versus development
 - renewable energy, good or bad?
 - local communities versus large estates (e.g., a comparison of Eigg and Alladale)
- You must describe + *interpret* your sources. For best results, draw on a mix of text (in the strict sense of words) and images; also perhaps music if you use some of the video clips. The sources that you will use are creative in their attempts to bring the audience round to their particular point of view, so you must also be creative and persuasive with your interpretation.
- The emphasis here is on your ability to work with qualitative data, but use of the literature (see below for starter references) will add context and depth to your analysis. Your answer should incorporate a short discussion of methods that justifies their use for this task (as would be expected for a dissertation or research paper).
- So think report rather than essay: e.g., does it help to use sections, how best to show your data?
- If you can relate this exercise to your dissertation topic, do so.

Starter references

- Cosgrove, D. 2000. 'Sense of place', in R. J. Johnston *et al.* (eds), *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, fourth edition. Blackwell, pp. 731-734. [In my view, better than Wylie's revised entry in the new, fifth edition.]
- Morin, K. M. 2003. Landscape and environment: representing and interpreting the world. In: S. L. Holloway, S. P. Rice and G. Valentine (eds), *Key Concepts in Geography*. London, SAGE, pp. 319-334.
- Cope, M. 2003. Coding transcripts and diaries. In: N. J. Clifford, and G. Valentine (eds), *Key Methods in Geography*. London, SAGE, pp. 445-459.
- Bartram R. 2003. Geography and the interpretation of visual imagery. In: N. J. Clifford, and G. Valentine (eds), *Key Methods in Geography*. London, SAGE, pp. 149-159. [Nick thinks this is much better than Roberts' chapter in the third edition.†]
- Rose, G. 1996. Teaching visualised geographies: towards a methodology for the interpretation of visual materials. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 20, 3, pp. 281-294.
- Rose, G. 2007/2012. *Visual Methodologies*, 2nd or 3rd editions. London, SAGE.
- Dixon, D. P. 2010. Analyzing meaning. In: Gomez B. and J. P. Jones III (eds). *Research Methods in Geography*. Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 392-407.

† *Key Methods* is now into a third edition, with some minor changes, some major changes.

Also useful in *Key Methods* – although you may have to do a bit of lateral thinking to make the material in these chapters relevant to this exercise:

Black, I. S. Analysing historical and archival sources, pp. 477-500.

Doel, M. A. Analysing cultural texts, pp. 501-514.

or equivalent chapters in the third edition.

And in: Cloke, P., P. Crang and M. Goodwin (eds). 2005. *Introducing Human Geographies*, 2nd edition. London, Hodder Arnold. Same comment about the need to think laterally applies! See chapters by:
 Nash, C. Landscapes, pp. 156-166.
 Cloke, P. The country, pp. 451-467, especially pp. 458-463.
 Desforages, L. Travel and tourism, pp. 517-526.

A bit more ambitious...

Flowerdew, R. and D. Martin (eds). 2005. *Methods in Human Geography* – chs 13 (M. Crang on qualitative materials), 14 (S. Aitken on textual analysis) and 15 (S. Aitken and J. Craine on visual methodologies)

As much of this work draws on tourism, perhaps check the entries on ‘tourism’ by Mike Crang in the fifth edition of the *Dictionary of Human Geography* and/or by Tim Edensor in the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (which also has a methods sections, with entries on, for example, content analysis, discourse analysis, landscape iconography, photographs). See also the wider social science literature on qualitative methods – check the main reading list. For example, the e-books by Bell (2006), Blaxter *et al.* (2006) and Rugg & Petre (2007) contains sections on content analysis and discourse analysis; see also Dixon (2010, reference above) and Montello, D. R. and P. C. Sutton (2006).

Submission

- **Submission deadline: 12 noon, Monday 2 May 2022**
- Leave wide (2.5 cm) margins, use 1.5 line spacing, include your student ID in the header, and add page numbers (for both of these, see **Header & Footer** on the **Insert** tab in Word).
- Do not write your name on your work, nor use it as part of the file name or submission title.
- Submit an electronic copy of your work (MS Word doc or PDF) to Turnitin using the appropriate link in the ‘Assessment’ folder. There is no need to submit hard copy
- Please include your student ID in the Turnitin submission title.
- Make sure that you obtain, and keep, your Turnitin receipt. If you don’t have this, it’s not on Turnitin!

Possible sources

– some of Nick’s suggestions from 2019, which could be combined in various ways. You will not be penalised for using these; quite the opposite. We have picked these sources out because we think they work, in terms of topic/theme, plus ‘juicy’ language and/or imagery to deconstruct. More than enough material here to do the exercise, **but please feel free to add your own if you wish...** For example, there’s not much on farming or rural settlements here. [Please excuse the odd broken link, as it’s difficult to keep up with the web these days.]

John Muir Trust – <http://www.jmt.org/>

Explore the website. Also, various resources at:

<http://issuu.com/johnmuirtrust>

The National Trust for Scotland – <http://www.nts.org.uk/Home/>

Scotland’s largest conservation charity; a major owner of land and property, pressure group and social institution. For example, try the pages on “countryside”:

<http://www.nts.org.uk/Countryside/>

or the recent/ongoing ‘For the love of Scotland’ campaign: <https://www.nts.org.uk/love>

or search the list of “places to visit”:

<http://www.nts.org.uk/Visits> – use the map to explore the NTS’s properties

Scottish Wild Land Group – <http://www.swlg.org.uk>

Pressure group + discussion forum; the SWLG’s online newsletter, *Wild Land News*, publishes reports, articles, editorials, letters... <http://www.swlg.org.uk/wild-land-news.html>



Robert Macfarlane on wind farms:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/feb/26/greenpolitics.renewableenergy>

Macfarlane – author *Mountains of the Mind* and *The Wild Places* is in the vanguard of the recent revival of nature writing in the UK.² Perhaps because it is explicitly political, this article is less florid than his usual stuff. Various reviews of *The Wild Places* are available online, for example, by the Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,2155516,00.html>

If this kind of literature interests you, Nick has a copy of *The Wild Places*. A Google search will turn up various articles by Macfarlane. Or chase up other pro- or anti-windfarm articles, pressure groups, etc.

Colin Prior – <http://www.colinprior.co.uk/>

Colin Prior is a landscape photographer whose work claims to “capture the essence of wild places”... His website includes many of his panoramic images of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, most of which were originally published in two books: *Highland Wilderness* (1993) and *Scotland: The Wild Places* (2001), with a third book, *High Light: A Vision of Wild Scotland*, published in 2010. Find the Scottish images in the showcase, or check out the shop. Nick has the books, and may let you borrow them if you ask him very nicely. Magnus Linklater’s introduction to *Highland Wilderness* is useful, as are Prior’s comments and technical notes in *Scotland: The Wild Places*.

See also, for example, Craig Aitchison (Land & Light), Neil Barr, Eilidh Cameron...

Glyn Satterley – <http://www.glynsatterley.com/>

A useful contrast to Prior. Satterley’s work is less obviously commercial – he still has an online gallery, not a shop! – but it also presents a different perspective on the Highlands. Check out the gallery sections on ‘landscape and outdoors’, ‘sporting estates’ and ‘fishing’.

Various Instagram sites offer plenty of photographic potential!

For example, Visit Scotland, Visit Cairngorms, Visit Inverness Loch Ness, North Coast 500... Or perhaps chase up hashtags (e.g., #aviemore) for a wider perspective. You could also try Flickr or (Flurina’s recommendation) Geograph.

Scotland the Big Picture – <https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/>

In their own words: “a non-profit social enterprise founded by a group of professional communicators motivated by the need to rebuild healthy ecosystems where wildlife and people flourish”. Promotes rewilding.

² See, for example, these *Guardian* articles:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2006/sep/20/society.scienceandnature>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,2137572,00.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/06/nature-writing-revival/print>

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/18/richard-mabey-defence-nature-writing/print>

Scotland Outdoor Access Code – <http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>

Information about the new access rights introduced by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The text of this legislation is available from this website, alongside a range of public information and promotional materials. Note that this site is maintained by NatureScot, the official state-sponsored body responsible for conservation and responsible use of Scotland's landscape.

Scottish Land and Estates – <http://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/>

This is the landowners' association.

Community Land Scotland – <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/>

For: the people, and small-scale sustainable development. Against: rewilding.

Isle of Eigg – <http://www.isleofeigg.org/>

Purchased from its absentee landlord in 1997, the Isle of Eigg is a pioneer example of the community buy-out; a famous case of the put-upon locals ousting the laird that stimulated later land reform legislation. The successful campaign mobilised ideas of social justice, wildlife conservation, tradition and history to legitimate a vision of independent grassroots development. This emphasis on heritage, both natural and social, community and sustainability is still evident in the Heritage Trust's website. More recently, Eigg has further upped its green activities/pretensions:

<http://islandsgoinggreen.org/>

You can also follow Eigg in Flickr:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isleofeigg/> – or Instagram or Twitter.

Alladale Estate – <http://www.alladale.com/>

Markets itself as a “wilderness lodge and reserve” – which, in itself, creates some contradictions. Part sporting estate, part luxury hotel, part safari park... part Jurassic Park? This is, to quote the website, “an extraordinary project to restore the Scottish Highlands to their natural glory, regenerating one of the oldest, most beautiful and inspirational wild places in Europe.” Wild as in wild animals. The website has much to work with, including a media library and image gallery. If you want a second example of work that seeks to ‘re-wild’ the Highlands by reversal of ecological change, try Trees for Life:

<http://www.treesforlife.org.uk/>

the charity dedicated to restoration of the Caledonian Forest.

Coul Links - <https://www.coullinks.co.uk>

~~American billionaire wants to build a championship golf course on a site protected for its conservation value. Where have we heard this before? This is a live controversy, so plenty of media stuff (Google!) to get stuck into. The public enquiry has just started (February 2019).~~

The original proposal was knocked back, but see:

<https://www.communities4coul.scot/>

<https://www.coullinksgolf.com/>

Aviemore and the Cairngorms – <http://visitcairngorms.com/>

Experience “Scotland's natural adventure”! The new tourist information site provides an excellent example of place-marketing. ~~We especially like the You Tube film, tucked away at the bottom of the homepage.~~ The original film is no longer there, although the video slot is presently taken by a splendid ‘Cairngorms from the air’ showreel shot from a drone. There's a YouTube library on the site. For the original (2007?) promo go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMtgP4XkJ_c. There is an obvious comparison/rivalry with Fort William and Lochaber, the self-styled “outdoor capital of the UK”:

<http://www.outdoorcapital.co.uk/>

Guardian Country Diary – <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/country-diary>

A Google search of “guardian country diary scotland” will pick up columns on Scotland. Is there a particular version of the Scottish countryside portrayed in these columns?

Wilderness Scotland – <http://www.wildernessscotland.com/>

Award-winning adventure tour operator with a strong emphasis on environment, community and sustainability.

Highland Heritage – <http://www.highlandheritage.co.uk/>

One of Scotland’s largest coach tour businesses, operating out of purpose-built hotels in Tyndrum and Dalmlally in the south-western Highlands. *Lochs and Glens Holidays* is similar –

<https://www.lochsandglens.com/>

Brightwater Holidays – <http://www.brightwaterholidays.com/>

A smaller tour operator that specialises in special interest holidays: e.g., Scottish islands, archaeology, gardens, rail/steam breaks.

Visit Scotland – <http://www.visitscotland.com/> and <http://www.visitscotland.org/>

The official tourist board websites. See, for example, the various e-brochures:

<http://www.visitscotland.com/e-brochures/>

although there’s plenty of other material: e.g., regional videos. Search YouTube for previous promotional films. The .org site covers brand marketing and tourist intelligence.

The Borders Railway – <http://www.bordersrailway.co.uk/>

Not the Highlands, not wild, not all about tourism, still rural...

Science and Society Picture Library – <http://www.scienceandsociety.co.uk/>

This holds the National Railway Museum’s archive of railway posters. A search for **railway poster scotland** produces 292 posters; for **railway poster highlands**, 60 posters. Some fascinating imagery from a bygone age...

Note the option to do one of the railways poster variants!

1. Representations of the ‘Celtic fringe’
2. Representations of the seaside

See the separate appendix for further details.

* * *

Tick-grid criteria for this assignment. Please excuse the split table!

		OUT- STANDING	VERY GOOD	GOOD	PASS	FAIL
<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	Level of understanding					
	Summary of research context					

	Focus + coherence of approach					
	Dev't of argument / wider discussion					
<i>Discipline-specific skills</i>	Justification of research methods					
	Quality and quantity of data					
	Interpretation/critical analysis					
<i>Communication skills</i>	Clarity + fluency of writing					
	Structure + layout of report					
	Use of tables and figures					
	Referencing (if applicable)					

The key point of this task is to produce a practical piece of research, not to write an essay. You need to identify, process and add value to 'raw data'. OK, so it's not quite data in the quantitative sense, but I like to think of your source material as data to which you must do something, as this helps to emphasise the original research requirement. You must describe your data/source material in sufficient detail for us to make sense of your work. **You also have to be creative in its interpretation: you are looking to show not just what is provided, but how words, pictures, possibly sounds contribute to making a particular point of view persuasive (i.e., rhetoric).** If you did GG2509, think back to the representations of the environment practical. We also want to see some use of the literature, as set out in the general Level 3 mark descriptors, as specified in the assignment brief above. Rough mark scheme, to complement the standard mark descriptors:

D

Provides an account that shows some aspect of 'contested landscapes' but limited use of sources, limited creativity, limited interpretation; i.e., digression, doesn't appreciate practical nature of task – perhaps overly reliant on published reports and papers in which the interpretation has, in effect, already been done for you.

C

Provides an account that shows some aspect of 'contested landscapes', making reasonable use of an appropriate variety of source material; perhaps limited in quantity and quality of interpretation (so falls short of 2.1 on sustained, reasoned, evidence-based arguments grounds) and/or limited use of literature (so falls short of 2.1 on use of literature grounds).

B

Provides an account that clearly shows aspects of 'contested landscapes' with effective use of source materials – consistently strong, credible, creative interpretation that moves beyond anecdotal to in-depth and/or systematic; supported by effective reference to research methods literature, perhaps some use of conceptual academic literature (e.g., sense of place, representation and social construction) or relevant research papers on your chosen topic

A

As 2.1, but with superior use of source material in terms of originality, creativity, critical interpretation and/or superior support from academic literature.