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Voices in a contested landscape: community participation and upland management in the North York Moors National Park

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ABSTRACT

The moorland plateau is the defining landscape of the North York Moors National Park in England. It reflects the everyday management decisions of land managers and the complex web of power relations between multiple stakeholders. The moorland is a contested, shared space that poses questions over access, habitat conservation, biodiversity, grouse shooting, land management, and ultimately, the purpose of National Park landscapes. This article draws upon a mixed methods approach and a heritage-landscape perspective to analyse community viewpoints of the management, use, and ownership of this landscape and to demonstrate how power relations frame human-nature synergies in the Park. In doing so, the article highlights new ways that North York Moors communities could be better represented in discussions on how landscapes are perceived, valued, and managed. It proposes a system that amalgamates key decision makers and residents and, therefore, involves a wider range of stakeholders in the landscape decision-making process.

KEYWORDS

Land management; National Park; community engagement; community participation; landscape democracy; land ownership; human-nature relationships; moorland; heritage; contest

Introduction

National Park landscapes in England are governed differently from many National Park systems throughout the world because much of the land in these Parks is privately owned rather than owned by the public. They also differ because they are working landscapes with recreational and industry pressures which are managed for the relationship between nature and culture. They have 'environmental qualities that are a consequence of human uses' (Hodge, 2016, p. 169), acknowledged by their International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) designation as Category V protected landscapes.[1]

With the high levels of human activity in English National Parks, community research in the North York Moors National Park (NYMNP)—the case study of this article—is an important approach to understanding the people who live and work in these protected landscapes and their relationships with the environments in which they reside. However, research into grassroots community movements in English National Parks is sparse in landscape studies and there has not been enough academic research into community power dynamics, influence, and identities that underpin landscape viewpoints in these protected areas, in particular the NYMNP. There has also been very little comprehensive research on the relationships between private landowners, moorland managers, and English National Park communities.

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This article presents new, pertinent data from an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research project to fill these gaps. It examines communities' views and experiences of moorland landscape, land use, and land management in the NYMNP, located in the north-east of England. The article demonstrates how the exclusion of landscape values by land managers in the NYMNP can cause tensions between communities in the uplands and how differing representations of a landscape can provoke the formation of a new type of community participation which brings a wider understanding of the valorisation of the land and feeds into decision making. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature and primary research on nature-culture relations, it offers new, critical insights into how community interactions with their close environments are framed by land ownership and power structures within English National Parks. These are areas where land managers are increasingly under pressure from the public and the UK government to implement sustainable, interconnected, and monitored landscape management practices, under new environmental land management schemes (ELMs), which provide ecosystem services to address the challenges posed by the climate change and biodiversity crises (Bailey et al., 2022; DEFRA, 2019).

In alignment with contemporary stakeholder research conducted on wildlife-human conflicts (Hodgson, Redpath, Fischer, & Young, 2018; Thirgood & Redpath, 2008), the data from this research project suggests that North York Moors communities could be better represented in discussions on how landscapes are managed to have a more equal voice. Landowners, the North York Moors National Park Authority (NYMNPA),[2] and communities should look to work in tandem to enhance current consultation platforms and create new types where communities can feel confident to put forward their opinions and knowledge. Decisions on landscape management can therefore be more of a shared, inclusive process, developing community relations and strengthening a collective identity that enriches social and ecological resilience within the Park.

The article offers in the following section an outline of the methods implemented for the project and then a review, based on the literature and the case study, of the following themes which were drawn from the data—connections, contests, participation, heather management, and land ownership in moorland landscapes. It then presents an analysis of these themes using Goathland in the North York Moors as a specific case study before, in conclusion, reflecting on how wider participation can better function in the National Park (Figure 1).

Designing a participatory methodology to understand connections between communities and upland landscapes

The data for this article is taken from a larger research project titled 'Contested natural-cultural landscapes in the Anthropocene: Connecting community identity, heritage and influence within the NYMNP' which ran from 2017 to 2022. The project implemented a mixed methodology primarily applying qualitative methods, including fifty-eight semi-structured interviews. Following a participatory approach, representatives from the local community and key stakeholder organisations were interviewed including the general public (who live in or near to these landscapes) (14), landowners and land managers (11), National Park Authority (NPA) (7), government bodies (5), conservation organisations and non-government organisations (10), local voluntary groups (6), developers (1), education groups (2) and tourism organisations (2).[3] The interviews were predominantly walking interviews amidst the landscape of the North York Moors. Walking interviews allowed the research project to investigate the everyday, embodied experiences of local communities and their interactions with nature in these relational spaces. The fieldwork took place from 2019 to 2020 and was supported by desk-based quantitative land ownership research. Focusing on three specific landscapes in the National Park, including the Goathland area, the project was a study to investigate how a wide range

Figure 1. A map showing the location of Goathland in the North York Moors National Park (OS OpenData on OS Digimap, OS OpenData © Crown copyright and database right, 2024).

of communities and key stakeholders connect with and have agency in these upland landscapes and their management.

Complying with established qualitative analysis guidance (Harding, 2019; Mason, 2018), the interviews were audio-recorded and the data was transcribed and analysed thematically using NVivo. The findings, developed from the themes, are disseminated throughout the article to reflect the views of NYMNP communities, supported by theoretical analysis of primary and secondary literature. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants.

Connections, contests and participation within a moorland landscape

As a National Park, the North York Moors has the highest degree of landscape protection, defined by a set of special qualities.[4] Landscape in the National Park is therefore an inherent term intertwined with its management and is a significant concept for understanding people's perceptions and experiences. The NPA also has a statutory duty 'to foster the social and economic well-being of the local communities' (NYMNPA, 2022, p. 9), therefore the NPA has an obligation, although not a statutory purpose, to look to enhance community life in these 'cultural landscapes'. Communities in the Park connect to its upland landscape through multiple, wide-ranging interactions with different people perceiving these uplands and their resources in a variety of ways (Holden et al., 2007; Mansfield, 2017). The new data from the research project established that the moorlands in the NYMNP are used differently by a large, diverse range of international, national, regional, and local stakeholders who each have their own set of changing beliefs, identities, and values. These include the NPA, landowners, Natural England, and community organisations that attempt to negotiate different interpretations and visions of

the same landscape (Smith, 2008) with many National Park communities dependent on these relationships for their resources and ecosystem services (Harden et al., 2014). Different connections and identities are formulated through these landscape types and land use and management (Hodge, 2016), thereby meaning that a landscape is contested but also agreed upon by individuals and groups of people.

'Contests' and 'agreements' occur in all landscapes; between humans (Suckall, Fraser, Cooper, & Quinn, 2009; Wylie, 2007), between nature, and between humans and nature (Soga & Gaston, 2021; Tsing et al., 2017; West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006). 'Contests' are defined for the purpose of this article as the ideas and debates within social relations in a landscape whilst 'agreements' are where a consensus is reached on these contests or where shared perceptions emerge (Taylor, 2008). In landscape studies, contest and agreement encompass a multifaced composition involving power structures (Olwig & Mitchell, 2007; Smith, 2008), ownership (Greider & Garkovich, 1994; Hodge, 2016; Shoard, 1987), governance (Hodge, 2016), policy (Hodge, 2016), and everyday community relationships and values (McKee, 2013). These concern local debates and participation in a landscape but are also interlinked to current national and global environmental challenges including climate change, pollution, and habitat loss which have affected rural communities' identities in recent years (Attorp, Heron, & McAreavey, 2023). Ultimately many of these contests and connections concern dynamic human-nature synergies shaping viewpoints on landscape and offering new opportunities for research in protected areas where the nature-culture balance faces considerable demands.

Across the academy, there have been many recent investigations into human-nature synergies, under the framework of the Anthropocene (Cooke & Lane, 2015; Soga & Gaston, 2021; Tsing et al., 2017), which has led to increasing scrutiny upon land managers, their role in upland landscapes and how they work in partnerships with local communities. Decisions over land can address the aforementioned national and global challenges by protecting against various forms of intense land use that put pressure on ecological systems and ecosystem services (i.e. poor moorland management, intense farming techniques, and inappropriate development). Hence, this type of research—which is scarce in protected areas like the NYMNP—is becoming more integral to landscape research, especially with a community-focused approach.

Power and ownership frames many of these synergies which affect connection, contest, and decision making. Current landscape research informs that stakeholders hold different amounts of power and influence within a landscape and exercise their power in varying practices to shape values and identity which is critical to this case study (Butler & Sarlöv-Herlin, 2019; Gailing & Leibenath, 2017). When a certain dominant group is making the key land management decisions, the landscape in ownership represents their exercise of this power (Greider & Garkovich, 1994). Using a case study of Argyll in Scotland, research by Syse (2010) into the role of experts in these decisions illustrates that the most powerful stakeholders in a landscape can define values and include or exclude the participation of others through their management practices. Sometimes this could be the result of a conscious decision to exclude others whilst other times this could be an unconscious choice. Certain values are emphasised in a landscape whilst others are excluded to the detriment of particular individuals or groups underlain by whom has the largest amount of power over a piece of land (Butler & Sarlöv-Herlin, 2019; Calderon & Butler, 2020).

In a privately-owned National Park, such as the North York Moors, it is often land-owning individuals, with assets and property rights, who are making many of the final decisions regarding land management. The culture and traditions prioritised in their business decision-making have shaped the environment (Hodge, 2016) and the NYMNP human-constructed environment is a consequence of their cultural values and behaviours towards the landscape over time. Therefore, these landowners have a strong influence over the tangible and intangible values people place on the landscape. Yet power is not always distributed equally in the decision-making process in a privately owned National Park and certain values towards a landscape can be

neglected or ignored. Often the financial resources of a landscape take precedence in land management (Hodge, 2016), leading to situations where landowners may not align their work with the vision or purposes of the Park, particularly if they anticipate economic losses.

Putting wider participation into practice in National Parks, such as the North York Moors was shown by the data from the interviews to be important to bring networks of communities together to enable responsibility towards a landscape to be shared across these communities and create an environment where ideas and actions can be mutually shaped. A growth in literature on landscape democracy and participation over the last twenty years has democratised 'landscape' with knowledge and values of all people associated with landscapes seen as fundamental by scholars to their management and sustainability (Arler & Mellqvist, 2015; Calderon & Butler, 2020; Taylor et al., 2015). Empowerment sharing within community participation research is considered to be crucial in complementing land decision-making processes, allowing open dialogue where all landscape values and identities can be put forward, justified, and understood but also acknowledging that certain values will be excluded during the process (Calderon & Butler, 2020). This approach seeks to enable all stakeholders who have claims on a landscape to have a voice, recognising bottom-up approaches as essential as top-down and advocating for both social and ecological justice in a National Park (Cole et al., 2023; Jones, 2007). Research on protected landscapes in the Anthropocene by Palomo et al. (2014), highlights the importance of diverse value systems and new, different knowledge sources to manage and 'govern complex adaptive systems', especially within a multifaceted National Park governance. For instance, new spaces for debate and understanding which can develop new and alternative connections and values have become integral to wider public participation (Gailing & Leibenath, 2017). Recent practical examples include citizen assemblies (i.e. The UK Climate Assembly in 2020) and citizen science which can be effectively combined with true deliberation methods (Mansbridge et al., 2012) to understand conversation in ordinary, less formal settings, uncover the origins of landscape connection and contest and enable agreements to be reached. Nevertheless, the role of power structures, including the influence of non-human elements, in protected areas is critical in determining the feasibility of deliberative, participatory frameworks.

Purple heather (*Calluna vulgaris*)

The NYMNP is a widely diverse landscape with a high heather moorland plateau (divided by deep narrow dales), pastoral farmland, deciduous woodlands, conifer forests and a rocky coastline. The open heather moorland landscape is the defining feature of this National Park covering 30.8% of the land within the National Park boundary, is the largest area of continuous heather moorland in England and Wales (NYMNPA, 2018). The moorland produces a unique habitat across the National Park, consisting of a mix of wet and dry heath, blanket bog, flushes, bracken, and acid grassland (NYMNPA, 2013). The heather itself provides food for sheep and red grouse and is a nesting area for ground birds (NYMNPA, 2018). Its conservation is crucial to the upkeep of the National Park's special qualities; 88% of the National Park's moorland habitat is recognised by a variety of international and national conservation designations (Figure 2).

The moorland plateau is characterised by a low human population density with few residents living on the plateau and a modest influx of tourists visiting during peak season. Most of the 23,135 NYMNP population are based in small villages in the valleys of the moors, on scattered farmsteads, or on the edges of the National Park in the towns of Pickering and Helmsley (ONS, 2020). The moorlands are also landscapes which are very much subject to human management via the continuous stewardship of land management practices. UK government agri-environment scheme payments support the work of many land managers including graziers on these moors. Landowners and land managers decide how the land is used

Figure 2. Ling, cross leaved heath and deep dark pink/purple bell heather dominate the vistas in the NYMNP (Photograph by author, 2020).

and managed in the moors with the intensity of management across different heather moorlands varying in the Park, often depending on the desired augmentation in red grouse population.

Shooting is one of the predominant uses of land in the National Park alongside agriculture and forestry. Much of the land in the National Park is used for grouse, pheasant, and partridge shooting, and the infrastructure of the moorland—the tracks, the butts and lodges, for instance—are constructed for the purposes of shooting. The large expanses of heather moorland in this National Park were a nineteenth century creation by wealthy estate owners to build an environment for red grouse shooting to take place. A shooting culture has developed since then which has been closely affiliated with certain villages and settlements in the North York Moors. The field sport's class allegiances with the landed gentry and aristocracy have meant that the management of heather moorland is symbiotic of old and new money estates, positioning moorland as valued for its prestige and status. The people in these upland communities tend to be involved in 'the shoot' through jobs, such as gamekeeping, beating, driving, and catering. The activity, since the Victorian period, has been a commercial industry attracting a broad UK and international audience which can bring money into the local tourism economy. The project found that there are c.20–25 grouse moor shooting estates in the North York Moors and many run at a loss and are subsidised by the landowner or the sporting tenant.

Shooting of game has been hugely contested in recent years, not only in the North York Moors but also across northern England and Scotland, with political debates in the media, social media, and through reports over whether shooting has positive or negative impacts on the environment. These deeply rooted, often polarised debates over moorland management and game shooting are based on a multitude of complex contests—public perceptions

of an upper class/business networking field sport; conservation debates including rotational heather burning damaging ecosystems and carbon storage; and wildlife conflicts which dispute raptor persecution. As highlighted by well-established research into grouse moor politics and conflict resolution (Hodgson et al., 2018; Thirgood & Redpath, 2008), views on these topics are entrenched within moorland society and intertwined with different identities, underlined by land ownership and power relations, and these conflicts can be heightened in 'nationally' protected spaces often deteriorating with the influence of social media in recent years.

Land ownership and community influence

New research into land ownership in the National Park enabled the project to consider which key decision-makers are in a position to influence the types of values and perceptions of the upland landscape and how power structures frame connections, contests, and participation within the National Park.

The management and control of large areas of the moors—in particular the heather moorland plateau—is in the hands of mostly private owners. 80% of the National Park is owned or leased by private organisations and individuals with c.97% of heather moorland (Section 3 moorland) in private ownership (NYMNPA, pers. comm.). Although the Forestry Commission, a public body, is the largest landowner in the National Park owning 13.1% of the land in the Park. Private landowners or estate land managers will make many of the key decisions over the future of the North York Moors landscape, how change is controlled, and how people perceive and experience the landscapes. In agreement with Greider and Garkovich (1994), the research project found that the landscape that dominates the National Park is the landscape type that represents the landowning groups. The data from the interviews and the literature analysis indicated that it is many of the decisions that these landowners make that affects the individual and collective values attributed to the elements of a National Park landscape.

The NPA have limited statutory legislative powers over land management and nature conservation decisions and own only a small amount of land (1445 acres) in the Park. They are not able to override certain land management decisions made by landowners which are not liable to planning legislation. Most decisions are made through agreements, contests, and co-operation between the NPA, Natural England, the landowner, land managers, farmers, and gamekeepers to achieve land management aims (aims and agreements are written up in agri-environment schemes). Natural England will hold a certain amount of legislative power over designated sites in the National Park, such as SSSIs (Site of Special Scientific interest), but the landowner will make many of the final decisions on land use and landscape change. Through owning these assets and property rights, many landowners possess huge amounts of influence in the National Park and they have the power to decide how their land is to be managed and to be used only partly restricted by the town and country planning system, public access, and conservation designations.

Whilst much of the National Park policy rhetoric is about community involvement and representation, landowners do not formally have to consult with the general public on land management decisions. Communities can be limited in the type of influence they have in these landscapes with regard to land use and management. The public, which through the planning system are given an opportunity to have their say on planning policy and applications, have very limited formal consultation methods of impacting on a decision regarding land use and land activities that sits outside the town and country planning system. The research from which the article draws highlights that landowners and land managers have their own self-interests to look after. They are not always likely to subside their decision making and transfer this power to the public to involve a wider range of communities. There would have to be incentives on

offer (i.e. through future agri-environment schemes), changes to the law and policy, or a recognition of the value of community interaction for landowners and land managers to change their current consultation methods. Therefore, how much community engagement takes place within certain landscapes is dependent on the specific landowner. As a NYMNPA Officer explained in an interview for the research project:

> *It very much depends on the attitude of the landowner themselves [if they consult with communities]. If there's a legal responsibility to them they will but over and above that it will depend on the personality of the landowner. So, it is very variable across the Park.*

The extent to which community consultation occurs differs from one estate to the next. Some estate owners in the National Park provided examples of some very positive community consultation work, sometimes led by employees working in community engagement or wider education roles. Most landowners and managers interviewed agreed that '*there is always more that could be done*' regarding community engagement about land management, yet it needed to be proven to be an effective, informative resource in decision-making, especially as some interviewees for the project perceived engagement as expensive and time consuming.

Contest and compromise in Goathland: an analysis

Ownership and moorland management

The land management of Goathland East and West Moor is a prime example of the differences in power and influence between land managers and the local community where contested, shared ideas and values towards conservation, biodiversity, and ecology co-exist in the National Park. The heterogenous nature of the Goathland community facilitated a mixture of attitudes towards the landscape from research participants with many giving assertive viewpoints whether they felt satisfied, indifferent, or unhappy with current moorland management methods (Figure 3).

The Duchy of Lancaster, the reigning sovereign, owns the majority of land in Goathland village and the surrounding Wheeldale, Howl, and Goathland Moors, with most of the heather moorland on the estate funded by government stewardship schemes (Natural England/gamekeeper, pers. comm.). New land managers—as this research project was taking place—had started to manage this landscape on behalf of the Duchy of Lancaster including from shooting agencies based outside of the local area. Their land management practices of rotational heather burning and sheep grazing, which are primarily driven by commercial grouse shooting, were perceived by some research participants to improve the upkeep of the moorland, retaining its wildlife and protecting the peat. They reasoned that heather burning regenerates the moorland vegetation, providing a habitat for wading and nesting birds, which in turn enhances its biodiversity and ecological richness. Moorland managers contend that their management practices have built a conserved, 'wild' environment with high levels of biodiversity, emphasising the criticality of their management practices to safeguarding its natural heritage.

Well-established cultural and social values were continuously reinforced by research participants who worked with the land, constructing the idea of a cultural landscape dependent on human presence in the Moors, protected by its designation as a National Park. Many interviewees tended to explain the moorlands as 'living' and 'working' in accordance with how the UK National Park system was set up in the 1940s and 1950s. Some interviewed land managers expressed a perception that both 'incomers'—new residents living in the Park and certain local people have very little comprehension of the workings of the countryside, misunderstanding that these are IUCN protected areas designated for their anthropogenic characteristics:

> *People move into this chocolate box landscape…that's how they want to retire. But it's still real life and a hard-working life, they don't always understand this community.* (Estate Owner)

Figure 3. Goathland East Moor (Photograph by author, 2020).

> *What people don't understand very often is that the heather is a managed landscape. They move into the area thinking I've got this wonderful wild moorland and don't know what goes on there and that it's a managed habitat.* (Land Manager)

Land managers are responsible for constructing the landscape in often cyclical patterns of work and are perceived by many as 'custodians of the land'; owning, arranging, and ordering the land. Through this notion of inheritance, they deem their working connection with the land as a form of privilege, which fits with the class associations in this royal land. In their decision-making processes, they attributed significant value to the moorland for its social, cultural, environmental, and economic benefits that it brings to local people while also recognising its impact on the special qualities of the National Park.

Contest, connection, and listening

Certain members of the Goathland community, including a mix of old and new residents, believe that there are new intensive management practices on the moorlands, such as an increased amount of rotational heather burning and more drainage of the moorland, which limit the amount of conservation management that takes place. They perceive the aims of these practices to be looking to produce high surpluses of game birds specifically for the purpose of grouse shooting, thereby endangering the protection of upland wildlife, peatland, and moorland biodiversity. They were also concerned about the debates connected to predator control management on these moors which would impact on the raptor population. In a landscape characterised by perceived stability, different intensive management practices were very apparent to some local residents prompting them to want to have agency in influencing these local landscapes

(Figure 4). Residents' identities are intertwined with these moorland landscapes and they felt they should have an input on the management of the surrounding landscape which impacts upon their daily lives, being, and feelings. Ordinary interactions with the surrounding village and moorlands have an important impact on the landscape and when these engagements are influenced by other human activities it can be a trigger for contest which can reveal old and new identities and connections (Harrison, 2013).

A subset of villagers felt restricted in expressing opinions on the shaping of the upland landscapes in the Park, a challenge exacerbated by the complex web of private land and sporting rights ownership adding to a lack of clarity around who communities should communicate with. Their voices were seen as being excluded from the decision-makers—the gamekeepers, people who own the sporting rights, and the Duchy of Lancaster—as two interviewees articulated:

> *One of the worries which you have as a resident here is how do you have any influence, - if you can, on anything.* (GMRG)

> *Almost feudal approach, you're the local serfs you know, we're the landowners, you work for us. In this day and age that doesn't buy a lot of the time.* (GMRG)

Based on the collected data, land managers, especially sporting agencies who were not local, are seen to be disconnected from village residents, adopting a top-down, paternalistic approach to moorland management. Community values and wider participation—recognised by landscape research scholars (Calderon & Butler, 2020; Jones, 2007; Taylor et al., 2015) as fundamental for landscape management and deemed crucial for the sustainable governance of National Parks

Figure 4. Fen Bog (owned by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) with Goathland East Moor in the background. There is a varied mosaic of grassland, heather, and woodland at Fen Bog compared to the managed Goathland East Moor (Photograph by author, 2020).

in this research project—are perceived to be impeded by the hegemonic, local political system with limited consultation opportunities. These are spaces in which humans 'imagine' personal connections—appreciating attributes, such as clean air, tranquility, purple heather, panoramic vistas, expansive skies, and strong community identity—but often they lack the ability to directly influence their composition. Certain members of the Goathland community identify with the landscape for its freedom and openness and when these value types are harmed by human interference, they fear a sense of identity loss:

> *I walk my dog on the moorland for the fresh air and if this is no longer the case because of intense heather burning then it affects my wellbeing.* (GMRG)

Landscape management in Goathland was observed to predominantly reflect the values of the most powerful stakeholders in the area, potentially marginalising communities' heritage-landscape values. The case study suggested that community values towards the moorland landscape are being excluded from decision making, which corresponds with existing landscape research highlighting participation deficits between communities in landscape decision making (Cole et al., 2023; Syse, 2010). Therefore, this prompts two questions: how much control does the general public have over their affiliated landscape identity? And whether their sense of belonging in a landscape is misconstrued within a predominantly privately owned National Park?

The combination of adversity towards local land management and a demand for agency on landscape matters led to individuals in the village forming a residents' association—the Goathland Moor Regeneration Group (GMRG). The group had been set up as a Goathland Parish Council sub-committee in October 2018, '*representing a portion of the local community*' and had been established:

> *To preserve and enhance the biodiversity of our local moors, waterways and woodlands and our continued access to them* (GMRG, 2020)

Many in the group had strong feelings that Natural England and the NPA have not held land managers with shooting rights to account for constructing tracks, draining the bogs on the moors and the intensification of heather burning which in turn has brought an increased amount of smoke into Goathland. Research participants from the GMRG believed that the surrounding moors have changed in character in recent years with '*more flooding, more burning, bigger grouse bags*' which has led to a biotic homogenisation of the landscape's ecosystems including a '*heather monoculture*' perceived as dominating the upland landscape. In an interview with a GMRG member, the research participant talked about how they thought that current upland management techniques and practices had damaged the moorland ecosystems:

> *The moors are now overburnt, there's no trees allowed to grow where there should be trees there and no raptors and no predators, it just works as an ecology, you need the whole system.* (GMRG)

The group perceived the current moorland management techniques as harmful to the landscape's biodiversity. Cultural intervention had become excessive to the degree that people were prompted to voice their strong sentiments on how they value the landscape, the land changes they have witnessed, and their belief in the importance of its biodiversity. In this context, people's connection with the moors are affected by local, endogenous environmental politics but, augmented by living in 'national' spaces, they are also influenced by wider, national political ecology debates about the significance of wildlife instigated by growing rewilding and regenerative farming movements, awareness of environmental protection and the declining state of nature (State of Nature, 2023), access and right to roam debates and the effects of climate change. The data showed that local people in Goathland have wider access to information about the environment with high levels of appreciation and local knowledge. According to certain people interviewed in Goathland, there seemed to be less recognition by decision makers

regarding the state of nature in these areas which are legally protected for their landscape value rather than biodiversity and nature. It has been suggested that the state of SSSIs in the National Park (of which 245 include Goathland West and Goathland East Moors) are in a poorer state than those nationally (CNP, 2018).

As suggested by the data, a dominant cultural heritage and powerful land ownership have meant that certain communities have found it difficult to speak out about the condition of the uplands. The creation of the group has given local people an opportunity to voice their common concerns about the uplands to others and these discussions as well as various talks have looked to encourage the Duchy of Lancaster, shooting parties and gamekeepers to converse with a wider range of local people about their conservation methods.[5] The GMRG were aware that their active opinions could cause tension between the community and land managers, but the group realised the importance of a collective voice in influencing the long-established, strong cultural activity on the moorlands:

> *It's quite refreshing what we saw in Goathland. Most local communities accept the moorland management. They have grown up with it and it is just the culture of their local area. Kids and teenagers will go beating on grouse days and get a bit of money like that, heather burning doesn't really bother them.* (Conservation Organisation)

> *We are all expected to bow down on one knee and do as you are told, well it doesn't quite work like that and for too long the villages have sat about, muttered and complained individually but as soon as you become a collective…* (GMRG)

Participation

Arising from pressure over the exclusion of community values, the case study found that wider listening and new participation opportunities emerged in Goathland through collaborative events initiated by the formation of the GMRG. The creation of the group and the reaction of the land managers to consult with local people has shown how deeply local communities care for these uplands, their biodiversity, and their importance to communities' everyday livelihoods, suggesting commonalities in the landscape values held. The tensions between land managers and the community have led to new forums where people feel confident to share their opinions on moorland management. For example, a public event called 'What are Britain's uplands for?' was organised by the Heather Trust in the village in September 2019, with a range of speakers from different stakeholder groups. In conservation conflict resolution literature, tensions are recognised for their role in enhancing comprehension of different heritage-landscape values and perceptions (Young et al., 2016). Public meetings have given all the invested stakeholders an opportunity to put their perspectives across and their local knowledge derived from interactions with these environments:

> *At the public meetings everyone has been able to have their say. They have been well advertised within the village. Everyone can go, there is every opportunity to be heard.* (Goathland Community member)

The community claimed that they should be given more of these types of additional communication platforms to enable this dialogue to occur which in turn can build stronger connections between all invested stakeholders. Conservation conflicts, demonstrated in this case study, can be viewed as an opportunity to build stronger relations between land managers and the local community. This is within recognition that more passive communities exist in the National Park who are perhaps not actively seeking to express their perspectives. Wider input from a more diverse perspective should be available for those who wish to utilise these options whether the platform is a Parish Council, an active community group—seen in this case study, improved consultation on the National Park Management Plan, or more localised strategic plans. The communication system across the National Park should look to better connect the complex

layers of National Park governance for open dialogue to work between the correct decision-making organisations to produce a shared vision for these landscapes. Compromise and attitude change towards the landscape, as highlighted in human-wildlife conflict research (Thirgood & Redpath, 2008) and in this case study, between those with different perceptions of the land, will also prove vital in bringing stakeholders together.

Widening participation in the NYMNP

In the NYMNP, current systems enable the public to be involved in the National Park Management Plan, the Local Plan, and through standard planning application processes. Yet many of the decisions about everyday estate management, which are critical to nature recovery and climate change mitigation and adaptation locally, do not involve these processes. The project findings revealed that the public are not always consulted in locally defined plans in the NYMNP, such as Environmental Stewardship, Countryside Stewardship schemes, or general estate management plans (if they exist) and can feel detached from landscape management decision-making, and specifically the objective-making of the estates which is perceived not to always consider their concerns. As evidenced by the case study, local needs, values, and identities can therefore be bypassed in land management. It is only in more active, organised local communities, such as Goathland, where people are willing to make their voices heard, that participatory dialogue has materialised.

Based on this case study, local community groups, such as the Goathland Moor Regeneration Group provide a new form of accountability to land management in the National Park offering a new and different perspective on upland management. Through open, deliberative dialogue, the case study suggested an alternative strategy to questioning dominant landowner and resident assumptions about land management in the National Park. As seen in Goathland, public engagement events can enhance the relations between land managers and the local community and offer opportunities for democratic, debating platforms. The community group brought to these types of events a wider human perspective on the land introducing new, local knowledge to decision making and actions which is much needed in this time of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. The group serves as an exemplar model for other community groups and highlights that land management can be questioned in the National Park.

Organisations, such as the NPA should be given the resources to understand local communities through similar public events to that seen in Goathland, especially at the start of projects so communities can be built into working relationships and land managers can look to understand what local people want from National Park landscapes. The development of community capacity building which Mansfield (2017) proposes to generate community interest and extend participation, could also be an option to build relationships from the start of consultation processes. Participatory dialogue needs to be mutually respectful within a co-operative system, with consultation opportunities from an early stage widely advertised to include those audiences who are hard to reach or disengaged (with the support and resources for National Park Authorities from central government to enable this to occur). Mini-publics, citizens' assemblies,[6] whole estate plans which include public consultation and youth councils are strong examples of equitable, democratic platforms for debate, but participation in this type of system can also look to move dialogue into less formal settings (e.g. walking groups and citizen science projects) (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Shaw, Draux, García Martín, Martin, & Bieling, 2017). Participatory platforms which facilitate rich, continuous conversation(s) between NYMNP communities that understand the values, narratives, and special qualities attached to a landscape and, based on this understanding, support those involved to take action. Public engagement about landscape change needs to be ongoing, as landscapes and their ecosystems as well as communities are in constant flux. Landscape decision-makers need to work closely in alignment with societal

influences/changes to understand the relationships between a complex society and the natural world in a landscape. This type of approach will ensure that communities feel that they have empowerment and ownership over influencing landscape conservation through this partnership work.

The research project found that in the South Downs National Park some estate managers working with local communities and the NPA are creating whole estate plans that are in alignment with National Park purposes, visioning, and special qualities. These plans can provide background information for planning applications by a landowner (or other stakeholders involved in an estate) and planning decisions made by the NPA. There were also examples of partnership working models from the Lake District and Exmoor National Parks which are potential governance approaches to integrate landowners and communities, including young people, in decision making.

The data from the wider research project demonstrated the significant knowledge land managers and local people on the ground hold about their relationships with the land and these epistemologies, especially those with lived experience, need to be put forward into public domains. With the forthcoming introduction of ELMs in 2024, if land managers are committed to delivering public goods in their landscapes via natural capital to ensure positive socio-ecological system benefits from the drivers of change (climate, land, and technology change), then local knowledge is vital in providing a wider steer on the complexity of landscapes. In 'national' spaces which are meant to be protected on behalf of the nation and are funded by taxpayers across the country, land managers will need to recognise the importance of wider voices and opposing viewpoints, especially as ELMs are based on 'public money for public goods'. There is also likely to be a role for the voice of the academic researcher within this system, in particular, traditional scientific and social science involvement to investigate the climate and biodiversity crises and stakeholder relationships with this role in certain projects filled by the NPA.

Inevitably, community consultation will have its limits. Landowners, who have significant legal rights, may not want to engage in lasting and complex discussions with local people and groups. This could be due to ideological reasons, based on any number of beliefs about the landscape, or practical, for example, time constraints. As Jones emphasises (2016), it must be recognised that there are challenges in combining deliberative/participatory democracy involving social movements, activists, and local community groups with the decision-making made through representative democracy (e.g. National Park boards or partnerships) or by private individuals. This type of wider participatory democracy can reduce the power of boards, individuals, and experts (e.g. land managers and academics) and can be perceived by all as time-consuming and costly (Jones, 2016). Here, there is a recognition that a wider participatory system is not necessarily faultless and there is still further research to be conducted on whether wider participation delivers more sustainable, resilient landscapes with healthier ecosystems (Roe, 2019). Different landscapes will require different systems—highlighted by the variety of ownership models in a National Park and the diverse National Park local governance systems across the UK—but ultimately a deliberative system that brings together a wider range of viewpoints, with significant knowledge on a landscape, can only benefit the climate and nature emergencies that the planet faces.

Notes

1. They are not considered in the IUCN category II as 'National Parks'.
2. There is an individual NPA for all 10 English Parks, mainly funded by central government, which oversees its administration and operation. They work with Natural England, a national public body, and other stakeholders from public, private, and voluntary sectors to achieve the purposes of a National Park.
3. There are specific research participant groups quoted in this article which fall under the following research participant categories: Estate Owner under 'landowner and land manager', Goathland Moor Regeneration Group under 'local voluntary group', and Goathland community member under 'general public'.
4. The six special qualities of the National Park are outlined in the NYMPNA Management Plan (2022).

5. In 2020, the GMRG were featured in a Channel 4 news story about raptor persecution on the Goathland Moors.
6. A citizen service selecting community representatives for the main NPA boards was referenced in the Landscapes Review (DEFRA, 2019). The Brecon Beacons National Park have followed these recommendations by using a citizens' assembly model to develop their 2022-27 management plan (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, 2021).

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Dr. Thomas Ratcliffe specialises in Sustainability, Tourism, and Heritage studies including research themes, such as community identity and participation, contested landscapes, sustainable land management practices, land ownership, power dynamics, and social and ecological inequalities. His research explores culture and nature relationships within the context of the biodiversity and climate crises in the Anthropocene. In particular, his research has focussed on green spaces mainly UK National Parks, and has used social science research methods including walking interviews. He completed an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded PhD thesis titled 'Contested natural-cultural landscapes in the Anthropocene: Connecting community identity, heritage and influence in the North York Moors National Park'. In addition, Tom is a co-convenor of the Ecological Justice Research Group and a member of the Visitor Economy and Experience Research Group at York St John University. He is also a member of the Human-Nature Relations Research group at the Centre for National Parks & Protected Areas, University of Cumbria. Before returning to academic life in 2017, Tom worked as a Heritage and Tourism Consultant for five years designing strategic plans and conducting audience research projects for National Lottery Heritage Fund projects at heritage and landscape sites across the United Kingdom.

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