

Working title: Can place-based decision making be used to protect the local community and natural resource related capitals?

Outline

This research is investigating the role of institutions and governance in local landscape and natural resource decision-making (bottom-up processes) to meet national legislative obligations (top-down rules and frameworks). This will be researched from the perspective of the multiple stakeholders' lived experiences.

Place and context-specific decision-making is arguably needed to deliver relevant benefits regarding the protection of local community and natural resource related capitals of our landscapes. This is recognised as important within scientific literature, policy and practice. For instance, DEFRA seem to recognise this through their tests and trials and language around the need to “codesign” ELMS. However, whether this type of locally adaptive decision-making is or can be applied in practice, beyond theoretical ideals, is in question due to the complexity and diversity of our social-ecological landscapes and the need to share power to enable place-based decision-making.

Case studies and methods

I will be using multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews (essentially conversations) and document analysis, within 3 common land case studies: one in each of Cumbria, Shropshire and Dartmoor that are part of the [Our Common Cause](#) project. Broadly, these commons are upland landscapes in England that are defined by multiple stakeholders who hold various legal rights of use and access including ownership, grazing rights and the public's recreational use. Comparatively more complex than land owned and used by a single person or farmer, for instance, collaboration is needed within these contested spaces.

I will be building an understanding of the diverse lived experiences of the commons, describing how land managers access and make use of multiple types of knowledge and information. I will be identifying the values and narratives that underpin governance and decision-making to identify conflicts, tensions and complementarities.

These elements – information sharing, values and narratives – are understood to shape the social and social-ecological relationships that define and inform common land management and are the basis of interpreting and analysing the data.

The research is based on an Action Research methodology, which is iterative and adapts to the needs of the stakeholders as the research develops. This first iteration is using a semi-structured interview approach, which is more like a conversation about the common in question. I will also be doing some policy/document analysis to view the narratives being applied from a top-down perspective.

Outputs

The exact outputs are unknown at the moment due to the iterative nature of the research and the aim to be of benefit to the stakeholders. However, broadly these could include a process description/conceptual diagram to show how place-based decision-making could be used. There will be a comparison between the commons to find if there are common elements and learnings which could be applied to other places. The PhD thesis will be completed in 2024.