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Development**

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The Roots of the People: an Investigation of the Influence
of Community Landownership in Scotland on
Environmental Narratives.

*All pictures taken by researcher. (l-r: Abandoned settlement at Loch Troimamarraig, Land Reform Act displayed at the Reinigeadal Hostel, North Harris trust cairn Bogha Glas)

Statement of Originality: I hereby declare that this dissertation has been composed by me and is based on my own work.

Signed: David Macpherson

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ABSTRACT

Scotland hosts the most concentrated pattern of private land ownership in Europe, with sporting estates covering 43% of rural land. In the last two decades a growing land reform movement, advocating greater power over land use and greater diversity of land ownership, has led to the rapid expansion of community landownership, with local people now owning approximately 500,000 acres of some of Scotland's most iconic landscapes. This governance model is rooted in narratives of sustainability and has been embraced by the current Scottish Government, leading to the building of new political momentum. Research in the past has focused on the economic and social impacts of community landownership. Therefore, this study considers the third pillar of sustainability: environmental responsibility. Through consideration of three framing narratives finding common expression in land reform and land use debates, an investigation was made of four community landowning areas to establish the influence of this transformative change. Results showed that community landownership contains the potential to recast relations with the environment by introducing a new pluralistic narrative of interpretation. This new narrative favours open, accountable, local governance and provides opportunities for broadening partnerships, leading to an approach to environmental management and land use characterised by its diversity and renewed confidence.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Across the sea from mainland Scotland, settled in the midst of the chain of remote islands that make up the Outer Hebrides, the Isle of Harris rises from the salt water, its close-cropped hills and bare rocky peaks bracing against the weight of the weather heavy sky. From the main town of Tarbert a road runs east to the Isle of Scalpay, connected to its larger neighbour by a bridge in 1997. Halfway along this road, as it sweeps past the Laxadale Lochs, a small footpath climbs into the Harris hills. Travel along this footpath for three miles, scaling then descending the two hundred and fifty metre shoulder of Trolamul, passing secluded coves and sheep grazing between the gable ends of abandoned settlements, and the traveller finds themselves in the small village of Reinigeadal. Until a road was finally built in 1990 this precarious path was the only way to access the small crofting hamlet (other than by boat) and was famously crossed by generations of Harris Postmen to deliver news, good and bad, to its rural residents. In the settlement itself, perched on a hillside, looking across the bay, is an old white-walled cottage. This is the Reinigeadal Hostel, established in 1960 by the outdoors pioneer Herbert Gatliff. Step inside its well-worn hall and take a left into the cosy living room – a place of rest and respite for countless Hebridean adventurers – and you will find a noticeboard displaying all kinds of helpful information, from the local bus timetable to contact details for sailings to the World Heritage Site of St Kilda. Pride of place, however, goes to a laminated copy of the front page of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

This piece of legislation, passed at the end of the then recently re-established Scottish Parliament's first session, established public rights of access to land for recreational and other purposes, and created a statutory framework by which rural and crofting communities could buy the land they live and work on. These latter provisions are a milestone in the development of community landownership in Scotland, marking its journey from the country's remotest rural outposts to the seat of government. Thus, in 2008 an evaluation of land reform in Scotland - a country with the highest concentration of private land ownership in Europe – was able to state that community ownership 'now occupies a central position in Scottish rural policy' (Slee et al, 2008, p.1).

Following a lessening of the political momentum driving the land reform agenda in the late 2000s (Wightman, 2011), the push for greater levels of community ownership of Scotland's rural areas has recently been given new impetus. The Scottish Land Fund, an essential enabling factor in the early waves of community buy-outs (Skerratt, 2011), has been re-established, with the Scottish Environment Minister, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, announcing at Community Land Scotland's 2014 annual conference that it would be available to help support communities pursuing land ownership until at least 2020 (Wheelhouse, 2014). This was preceded by the announcement at the previous Community Land Scotland Conference by the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond MSP, that the Scottish Government wishes to see one million acres of land in the hands of the communities that live on it by 2020 (Salmond, 2013). Paul Wheelhouse's statement came hot on the heels of the publication of the final report of the Land Reform Review Group – whose remit included presenting recommendations that would: 'Enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land, which will lead to a greater diversity of land ownership, and ownership types, in Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2013). All of these developments have taken place while Scotland as a whole wrestles with the question of where the power to direct the destiny of the nation, land and people, should rightly lie: a matter to be settled in a referendum on independence from the United Kingdom, to take place on the 18th of September 2014.

With the Scottish Government preparing a new Land Reform Bill – to build on the recommendations of the LRRG and to be presented to MSPs the end of the current parliament – research focusing on those aspects of community ownership not commonly addressed in the current literature offers the opportunity to broaden the base of understanding of its impacts and influences at a particularly pertinent time. As noted by Pillai (2010) the current Land Reform Act puts the concept of sustainable development at the heart of Scottish rural development policy, with showing a clear commitment to such development forming a key condition of the registration process for aspiring community landowners. While the Act itself shies away from giving a

definition of sustainable development,¹ traditionally the concept is arranged under three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental responsibility.

To date, research on community ownership has tended to focus on the economic (e.g. Bryan & Westbrook, 2014) and social (e.g. Skerratt, 2011) impacts, or at sustainability as a whole (e.g. Mc Morran et al, 2014). The impacts and influences on communities' interactions with their local environments have received less attention, with Slee et al (2008, p.10) reporting that this aspect of land reform required greater consideration. This research therefore attempts to fill some of the gaps in this area the debate by investigating the effects of community-ownership on environmental perspectives and attitudes. An understanding of such attitudes is important as the underlying values they draw on can be both a source of conflict within communities and a framework around which to build consensus (Sidaway, 2005).

The focus of this research project is therefore to:

- To investigate the influence community landownership has on the environmental perspectives of the people and organisations involved;
- And, to explore the effect such influence may have on their interactions and engagement with their immediate natural surroundings.

¹ Pillai (2010, p.899) explains, a definition was included in the draft legislation, noting sustainable development was 'development calculated to provide increasing social and economic advantage to the community and to protect the environment' but was removed before the bill became law.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to build a strong theoretical foundation for the research, the first stage of the study was to undertake a comprehensive literature review, covering the development of the Scottish Land Reform movement, its current state, its place within wider theories of community-based development and the most prevalent environmental narratives within the Scottish land debate. The results of this are presented below. The central themes uncovered were used to direct the development of the field research strategy, a description of which is given in Section 3.

2.1 Scottish Land Reform: past to present

In comparison to the dominant global philosophy of land reform that favours the breaking up of large land holdings into small privately held units, Scotland's focus on community-based models can be seen as somewhat unique (Hoffman, 2013, p.289; Bryden & Geilser, 2007, p.31). There is now in Scotland approximately five hundred thousand acres of land held under community ownership (Community Land Scotland, 2014). As noted above, at Community Land Scotland's 2013 annual conference, the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond MSP, voiced a wish to see this area double to one million acres by 2020 (Salmond, 2013). That Scotland, the country with the most concentrated pattern of private landownership in Europe (Bryden & Geisler, 2007, p.28) has chosen a different path to the global norm is understandable when one considers the history that has given rise to this current distribution.

2.1.1 Seeds of conflict and resistance

Until the mid-18th century, land use in northern and western Scotland was rooted in the familial structures of the clan system. Clan lands were not owned by the chief, rather they were viewed as the common property of all clan members (Hoffman, 2013, p.290). But this system waned in the latter part of the 1700s and clan ties began to unravel. This was due firstly to economic and political centres in the south increasingly drawing chiefs away from their lands, setting them apart from the needs and wants of their brethren. Secondly, the failure of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion led to

both the abolition of the central militaristic elements of clan society, and the large scale confiscation and redistribution of the lands of defeated chiefs. Together these forces eroded the relationship of shared heritage and responsibility between chief and clan, and replaced it with the economically based relationship of landlord and tenant (Hoffman, 2013, p.290).

This separation of land from clan paved the way for the large scale evictions and forced relocations of the Highland Clearances. These Clearances – the often violent removal of entire communities from fertile inland valleys and glens to marginal coastal areas – were undertaken to enable landlords to reap higher rental incomes from sheep farming. Latterly, after the purchase of the Balmoral estate by Queen Victoria in 1848, providing space for the royally endorsed pursuits of deer stalking and other game sports motivated even larger land purchases, so that by the 1870s sporting estates comprised almost 60% of Scotland's land area (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.18).

The experiences of the Clearances have given rise to a narrative of the Highlands as a wounded land, sheltering a disenfranchised people. Commentators talk of Scotland having a scar on its psyche (Brown, 2006, p.111) and of the Clearances remaining 'elemental in community awareness' (MacDonald, 1998, p.239). This narrative commonly underpins contemporary arguments in favour of community ownership (Rhode, 2004) and, in a small number of cases, continues to drive acts of direct violence against prominent symbols of the period, such as the repeated rounds of vandalism against the statue of George Levenson-Gower, First Duke of Sutherland (BBC News, 2011) that stands over the eastern village of Golspie. The interaction between this narrative of oppression and disenfranchisement with that of the landowning class as steward of the land and keeper of history will be explored in a Section 2.3.1. For the moment, it is important to note that the evictions of the Clearances were largely undertaken on a community scale, with whole settlements or groups of settlements removed from the land on mass. These removals were not uniform or universal, with their intensity and location determined largely on the wishes of particular landlords and their plans for development of the land. But where people were cleared, sometimes having their homes and possessions burned behind them, and clan and land gone, community is often all evictees had left.

2.1.2 Reform takes root

After the Clearances, Bryden & Geisler (2007) identify three distinct periods in the Scottish land reform debate. The Crofters Holding (Scotland) Act of 1886 gave crofters guaranteed fair rents and instilled measures of secure tenancy into law. Then in 1922, following the end of World War I and calls for Scottish land to be made available to the returning soldiers who had fought to protect it, Lord Leverhulme gave his large estate on the Isle of Lewis to the local community. The Stornoway Trust, Scotland's oldest community land owning trust, was created in 1923 to manage the land. The third and current phase of land reform had its watershed moment when The Assynt Crofters Trust was created in 1992 to purchase the 21,300 acre North Assynt Estate on behalf of local crofters. In doing so it was seen by many locals and commentators as going some way to righting 'the wrongs of centuries past' (MacAskill, 1999). This community buy-out, primarily motivated by a wish to prevent the splitting up of the Estate into smaller private lots (Mackenzie et al, 2004, p.168; Chenevix-Trench & Philip, 2001, p.146), has been called a 'defining moment' for Scottish land reform (Brown, 2006, p.112) and has been followed by a string of other high profile land buy-outs – including the Isle of Eigg (1997), Knoydart Estate (1999), the Isle of Gigha (2001), the North Harris Estate (2003) and the 41,000 ha South Uist Estate in 2006 – bringing community ownership from 'the radical fringe to the mainstream' (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.20).

The reconvening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, and the accompanying removal of land rights from the legislative purview of the - then still aristocratically based - House of Lords, created the opportunity to root land reform in strong legislative and institutional frameworks (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.17). From then, through developments such as the creation of the Scottish Land Fund in 2001 and culminating in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 community ownership became 'embedded in the governance of Scotland' (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.21). By 2005 the Land Fund had provided funding for 200 community projects, including the buy-outs of two of the above mentioned areas (the Isle of Gigha and the North Harris Estate), committing over £12million in funding (Bryden & Geisler, 2007, p.30). The Land Reform (Scotland) Act, by creating a right of primacy of purchase for registered communities when land was put up for sale (and the power to force a sale for crofting communities), radically altered the traditional power relationship between landlord and tenant (Pillai, 2010, p.904). While the actual provisions of the Act have rarely been used – by 2008 less than 25 communities had actively invoked the formal

powers of the Act (Slee et al., 2008, p.95) – both the Scottish Government’s own research and academics agree that these figures underestimate the catalytic impact of the legislation in spurring on communities, and landowners, to explore new and different ownership and management options (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.26/27; Hoffman, 2013, p.295; Slee et al., 2008, p.8 + 95).

2.1.3 Branching out and bearing fruit

The embracing of this less formal approach to redefining communities is perhaps the reason community buy-outs in Scotland now exist in a plethora of different guises. Mackenzie et al (2004) give examples of a purely crofter ran trust (in the Assynt Crofters Trust), a more integrated model where crofters and other community members share responsibility (in Bhallos) and a community woodland trust (the North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust), which has resulted in a new political space for women to become more involved in local governance. The Isle of Eigg and the Knoydart Foundation represent examples of charitable companies formed to buy land and run as partnerships between local residents, conservation charities and the Highland Council. The North Harris Trust represents another route to community ownership, with the buy-out of the estate being made possible by the intervention of a private investor, Ian Scarr-Hall. In a joint bid with local residents, Mr Scar-Hall bought the Amhuinnsuidhe Castle and selected fishing rights, while the community took ownership of the great majority of the surrounding estate (Mackenzie, 2013).

Those who feared land reform might be slipping from the political agenda (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.24; Wightman, 2011) have recently been given cause for celebration with the establishment of a new Scottish Land Fund, with £9million set aside to ‘support rural communities to become more resilient and sustainable through the ownership and management of land and land assets’ (Big Lottery, 2014), and the convening of the Land Reform Review Group in 2012. The remit of this group included identifying ways to enable ‘more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in ownership, governance, management and use of land’ and to ‘Assist with the acquisition and management of land (and land assets) by communities, to make stronger, more resilient, and independent communities which have a greater stake in their development’ (Scottish Government, 2013). Its final report, published in May 2014, noted that existing buy-outs had demonstrated that local communities possessed the capacity to manage large areas of land (Land Reform Review Group,

2014, p.93) and recommended that the Scottish Government should develop a policy statement 'on the objective of diversified land ownership in Scotland, and a strategic framework to promote the continued growth of local community land ownership.' (p.242). Key recommendations to the Scottish Government aimed at embedding the concept of people-centred land governance in future land reform debates. They included:

- Setting an upper limit on the amount of land that can be held by a private landlord;
- Easing the bureaucratic burdens on communities and crofting communities seeking to buy land through the Land Reform Act 2003;
- Ensuring community land purchases have the support of an integrated and continuing legislative and financial framework.

As noted in the introduction, at Community Land Scotland's 2014 conference, in response to the LRRG's report the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, committed the current Scottish Land Fund to continue until at least 2020 and announced that a new Land Reform Bill, building on the group's recommendations, would be laid before Parliament during the current session (Wheelhouse, 2014).

Given this new impetus, it is important to explore the experiences of communities who have already taken ownership of their land so that those who might be considering undertaking a similar venture in future have a clear view of the opportunities and challenges which may lie ahead. But before narrowing the focus to consider one of these possible opportunities – reshaping relationships with natural surroundings – it will be helpful to first broaden the picture and examine how land reform in Scotland fits into wider, global narratives of community ownership and empowerment.

2.2 Community Based Natural Resource Management

Preceding the renewed rise of land reform and community ownership in Scotland ushered in by the formation of the Assynt Crofters Trust, the growing global focus on community based 'bottom-up' development strategies throughout the 1980s and 90s laid important theoretical groundwork for Scotland's new land ownership models. While it is recognised that communities have worked together to manage and utilize

common pool resources for thousands of years, Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) grew as a field of development theory primarily as a reaction and counterpoint to Garret Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons' challenge, the policies it inspired and the fortress conservation narrative it endorsed (Argawal & Gibson, 1999, p.631; Dressler et al., 2010, p.6). Over the last two decades of the twentieth century CBNRM became an increasingly popular framework around which to structure development projects. Making claims of community empowerment and increased environmental responsibility, it was promoted by governments and development agencies alike, leading so to calling CBNRM the 'new orthodoxy' (Bryden & Geisler, 2007, p.25). Despite this apparent congruence, at the level of implementation and administration CBNRM remains an amorphous concept meaning 'widely different things to different people' (Blaikie, 2006, p.1943). Having traced the historical roots of community landownership in Scotland, it will also be useful to unearth these theoretical roots, showing how wider academic criticisms and debates have found expression in the Scottish context.

2.2.1 Communities: putting people in their place?

At the centre of CBNRM is the supposed position of local communities in relation to their natural surroundings, and, as Argawal and Gibson note (1999, p.631), this is a position subject to the ebbs and flows of theoretical fashion. As colonial rule spread across the globe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romantic ideals of people-free landscapes maintained for the pursuit of elite leisure activities and aesthetic appreciation (Dressler et al., 2010, p.6) drove the forcible removal of communities from traditional areas.

This was a trend tied to colonialism, but not restricted to the colonies. Lorimer (2000) draws convincing parallels between the colonial conversions of traditional community lands in Africa into hunting grounds for European elites with the similar process of Balmoralisation underway in the Scottish Highlands. Disenfranchisement of the local population under the guise of 'Anglo-European scientific understandings of nature and culture' (Dressler et al., 2010, p.6) were a central part of the colonial examples, but it is important to note that this 'scientific understanding' and the power it gave was in the hands of a domestic aristocratic elite and was applied at home just as it was abroad (Lorimer, 2000, p.421).

The position of local communities as ‘innocent primitives’ (Argawal & Gibson, 1999, p.631) steadily gave way to one of communities as despoilers of valuable resources. Given the theoretical backing by Hardin’s thesis, there was a shift from the view that communities did not understand their surroundings to a view that they could not be trusted with them (Ostrom et al., 1999, p.278). But by the 1980s the legacy of failure generated by planned development and the crumbling of fortress conservation provoked another rethinking of the relationship between communities and the environment. Revised ecological and anthropological frameworks brought human action back within natural cycles, recasting local practices as inherent parts of natural ecosystems. Alongside this, the spread of democracy allowed local voices to challenge the imposed, top-down regimes.

Community involvement became a ‘touchstone’ for rural development and sustainable resources use (Blaikie, 2006, p.1943). Local people, it was argued, had both the greatest interest in managing natural resources – as they were directly dependent on long-term availability of the resource – and the greatest knowledge of the resource as they were intimately connected to it in both their current and historical experiences (Argawal & Gibson, 1999, p.633).

Uptake of this new decentralised model spread quickly, with World Bank funding for participatory or community-driven projects rising from US\$325million in 1996 to \$2billion in 2003 (Platteau, 2004, p.223). However, as an approach to empowering communities and conserving resources it has come under increasing critical pressure. Dressler et al. (2010) argue that CBNRM has reached a crisis point: success has been rare and the underlying narrative of the power of the local seems to be unravelling. Blaikie (2006) adds that the rhetoric of community and its emotional pull drive projects forward with little consideration given to what their goals should be or how one would know when those goals have been met. In concert with Argawal and Gibson (1999), he emphasises that even identifying a community in the first place, in which to invest shared goals and interests, is no easy task (Blaikie, 2006, p.1944).

2.2.2 Scottish communities: Who, What for and Where.

The presumed existence of this entity called community is explicit in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Rather than giving powers for collective ownership, community ownership is the model endorsed. Furthermore, sustainability is hardwired into the

definition of 'community' by the condition that an ownership body 'is not a community body unless . . . the purpose of the body is consistent with furthering the achievement of sustainable development' (LRA, 2003, S.34, ss.4). The implication is that a group of individuals cannot be a community if they do not share a vision compatible with the long-term conservation of local resources. Pillai (2010) argues that this cementing of sustainability in the conception of community is the most radical element of the Act. However, as Pillai also recognises (2010, p.898) sustainability itself is a slippery term and, given that most buy-outs have not utilized the route provided by the Act, it should not be assumed that areas in Scotland under community ownership are necessarily managed in line with a shared concept of sustainability. Of those community trusts which have explicitly endorsed the sustainability agenda, the further question arises: which concept of sustainability (weak or strong) is being pursued. That all community members would be consciously united behind the same meaning of the term cannot be guaranteed.

The real life development of community ownership in Scotland shows, as Argawal & Gibson (1999) and Blaikie (2006) argue, that the three commonly invoked characteristics which allow for the identification of distinct 'communities' – a fixed grouping contained within clear geographical boundaries, consisting of a homogenous grouping of individuals who share common interests – can be difficult to pin down and do not provide a sound basis for capturing the complexity of the social structures they purport to represent.

In the Scottish case, efforts to designate a community on grounds of residence in a geographical area run into difficulties when confronted with temporary residents, such as people who own holiday homes in the area, or with people who have only recently moved into an area (so called 'incomers') (Brown, 2008, p.346; Bryden & Geisler, 2007, p.31/32; Rohde, 2004, p213;). Attitudes towards such people amongst established residents can be very varied (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.21).

Secondly, the level of engagement with the buy-out process and the subsequent running of community trusts highlights differences in individual's visions for their locality. While some people actively take up significant volunteering roles, such as trust directorships, others feel decidedly uncomfortable with what they perceive as getting involved in their neighbours' business (Warren & McKee, 2011, p.32; Chenevix-Trench & Philip, 2001, p.146/7). Mc Morran et al. (2014, p.24) also highlight the difficulty of attracting a broad, representative demographic within community management structures. Taking up a directorship requires both a

considerable investment of time and the self-confidence to take on a great deal of local responsibility. Pressures such as these have made it difficult for some community trusts to involve young people with the management structures, yet they are viewed as key to long-term success.

Finally, with regard to shared norms, the idea that devolving land management decisions to the community level will create a harmonious system free from conflict is not one always borne out by the evidence. The construction of wind farms on community land, and local people's feelings towards this particular type of development, provides an illustrative example. On the Isle of Gigha, Warren & McFadyen (2010) found that the construction of community owned wind farms largely improved local resident's attitudes to wind energy, but even then support was not universal. On the opposite side of the fence, in Assynt, a proposed wind farm development near to the iconic mountain of Suilven created a great deal of tension within the newly formed Assynt Foundation resulting in the project being abandoned (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.25). Elements of this case highlight two key competing views of landscape: that of the preservationist's pristine environment (more typically associated with people who have 'moved in' to an area) and that of the 'working wild', (normally attributed to those who work directly on the land itself and have established roots in an area). However, Mc Morran et al. (2014, p.25) emphasise that this supposed dichotomy of incomers and locals is an over simplification not reflected in personal or shared narratives. Thus, even this attempt to identify sub-groupings or communities within communities on the basis of shared norms bares close scrutiny. It is of little surprise then that when declaring the three points advocates of land reform in Scotland should carefully consider, Bryden & Geilser (2007, p.31) list as their top choice determining which community the community-rights-to-buy are aimed at empowering.

2.2.3 Communities and the environment: natural partners?

The inability of CBNRM's proponents to define communities makes it difficult to explain exactly why *community* directed development is supposed to be better for conservation outcomes than a more top-down approach (Argawal & Gibson, 1999; Blaikie 2006). Lemos & Argawal (2006) argue that research on decentralised governance should focus further investigation on the supposed link between community control and environmental responsibility. They note that a better

appreciation of the ‘alterations of the subjective relationships of people with each other and with the environment, as part of changing relationships of power and governance - is crucial to understand outcomes’ (2006, p.304).

This link between people and the protection of their environment is important in the Scottish context because political support for community buy-outs is grounded in narratives of sustainable communities, where ‘sustainability’ is supposed to capture the three pillars of improved economic and social outcomes, and responsible management of the local environment (Pillai, 2010). However, concerns have been raised that the focus on these three objectives has been uneven, with the impact on environmental outcomes given less weighting than economic and social ones (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.21/2). This tendency for uneven evaluation was recognised by Slee et al. (2008, p.10) in their report for the Scottish Government on the effects of land reform, which stated that continued monitoring of the reform process must ensure all future evaluations consider environmental impacts ‘alongside their social and economic impacts.’

Before investigating how environmental relationships may have changed through the influence of land reform policies, it will be helpful to explore existing commonly encountered narratives in the Scottish context. The following section will serve as an introduction to the possible interpretations of the rural Scottish environment and show how these complex webs laid over and worked through the land can influence environmental and developmental decisions.

2.3 Environmental interpretations: staking a claim to the ‘real’ Scotland

Harvey explains ‘all proposals concerning “the environment” are necessarily and simultaneously proposals for social change’ and ‘are never politically neutral’ (1996, p.182). Similarly, the related concept of landscape, as Rhode (2004, p.200) notes, is not merely an objective, descriptive one. As much as they are shaped by geographic and geological action, and by the physical hand of human kind, landscapes are also shaped by the social and political systems which seek to control them. The environments and landscapes over which Scotland’s community land reform battles are being fought are no different. Opposing interpretations of the land and the environment, tied to cultural values and historical narratives, have been ‘key drivers of conflict’ (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.22) and, as Mackenzie (2013, p.6) notes, the

contested question of ‘Who has the right to define the meanings of nature?’ is at the heart of the issue. To explore this question more deeply, it is necessary to examine the background and influence of some of the key environmental perspectives and how, in the context of Scottish land reform, particular sets of people are related to them. Following the convention of current scholarship (MacDonald, 1998; Mackenzie, 2006 + 2013; Toogood, 1995; Chenevix-Trench & Philip, 2001; Lorimer, 2000), narratives of the environment will be split between traditional landowners, crofting communities and conservationists. It is recognised that, as with the designating of communities note above, in reality viewpoints are not uniformly ascribable to these three groups. Counter narratives from within groups will always be present, but it is hoped that these three positions will provide a useful base from which to explore the views encountered in the case study below.

2.3.1 Private Landowners: Stewards of the hills

While the discussion above has stressed the shift of rural land ownership in Scotland away from the private estate and towards the community, despite the significant moves that have been made, estate ownership by large traditional private landowners remains the norm. Community buy-outs (excluding woodland) cover approximately 200,000ha, but this is less than 4% of rural Scotland’s 7.5million ha (Mc Morran et al., 2014, p.21). On the other hand, sporting estates still account for 43% of all privately owned rural land, giving Scotland the largest concentration of land dedicated to game sport in Western Europe (Warren & Mckee, 2011, p.19). While Warren & McKee emphasise that a core of 1500 private estates have held deed over much of Scotland for up to nine centuries, the current defining narrative of the Scottish laird – positioned as sporting gentleman and custodian of tradition and nature – is a more recent development.

Given seed in the period of Balmoralisation, noted above, that followed the second round of Clearances at the end of the 19th century, Lorimer (2000) and Samuel (2000) both cite the sprouting of this new narrative in the early part of the 20th century. With their economic and political power lessening (Samuel, 2000, p.694) and facing the rollback of colonial influence and a growing discontent from some sectors with blood-sports (Lorimer, 2000, p.414 + 421), landowners repositioned themselves by creating a ‘culture of nature’, turning the engineered deer forests that had come to dominate the landscape into a historical wilderness and casting themselves as being

imbued with the particular qualities required to protect and maintain it. They cultivated an image of being both stewards of the land and protectors of the 'traditional' lifestyles of people who inhabited it, an image which still finds wide self-expression among large estate owners today (MacMillan et al., 2010, p.35).

This change was accompanied by the invocation of a spirit of benevolence, both to those living on their estates and to the nation as a whole. Lorimer explains (2000, p.416):

'the stated intention of the sporting laird was to ensure only the gradual and controlled arrival of modernity to peripheral regions, whilst ultimately bequeathing to the local inhabitants the continuation of their simplistically rustic but civilised outlook on life.'

Again, MacMillan et al. (2010, p.34) have shown that emphasis on the importance of making a positive contribution to local rural areas, and the welfare of their inhabitants, continues to be forefront in the minds of many lairds.

Similarly, through institutions such as the National Trust for Scotland (established in 1931), the areas previously inhabited by these rustic communities were re-packaged as a pristine, historically constant wilderness with red deer occupying the key ecological niche (Lorimer, 2000, p.422). This 'monopolisation of historical interpretations of the land' (Samuel, 2000, p.700) still holds strong influence over conceptions of the Scottish environment today, owing in part, as Toogood (1995, p. 104) and MacDonald (1998, p.241) note, to its depopulated, ecologically barren landscapes having been appropriated by the cultural history and tourism industries to capture a view of the 'authentic' Scotland.

Wightman & Higgins (2000) argue that despite traditional landowners assertions of providing essential investment in what would otherwise be economically unviable areas, sporting estates (in the great majority of cases) do not attempt to maximise profits. These estates, critics contend, are not businesses in the true sense, but rather 'a form of conspicuous consumption' (Wightman & Higgins, 2000, p.19) or a 'lifestyle choice' (MacMillan et al., 2010, p.39) aimed at the non-financial benefits of ownership. Rather than increasing investment in rural areas they are said to retard it, as maintaining the Victorian and Edwardian traditions of stalking prevents investment in modern outdoor pursuits more appropriate for the twenty-first century (Wightman & Higgins, 2000, p.30).

While MacMillan et al. (2010) have shown a strong continuing uniformity among private estate owners on the preference for the sporting model, recently, changes in estate-owner motivations and economic pressures have encouraged some estates to focus on rewilding as a management approach (e.g. Alladale Wilderness Reserve; The Corroul Trust) (Brown et al., 2011, p.299). In these estates there has been a flattening of the ecological hierarchy - with Alladale, for example, reducing its deer herd by two thirds over ten years to encourage native tree restoration and habitat diversification (Alladale Wilderness Reserve, 2014, p.13) – and an embracing of alternative outdoor pursuits, such as wildlife safaris and survival training courses. These developments point to the potential for diversity in estate management and underline the earlier caution that the environmental narratives presented here are fluid, evolving stories, and should not be read as prescriptive labels, but rather used as points of focus.

2.3.2 Crofting communities: ingrained identity

Crofting communities, or those communities where crofting still plays a prominent social role, often challenge both the laird's position as guardian of the landscape and his vision of the landscape. While the landlord invokes the narrative of the benevolent steward, the crofters' interpretation of the landscape is most fully contained in the concept of dùthchas.

Dùthchas, derived from the Gaelic language still spoken in many crofting communities (particularly in the Western Isles), is not readily translatable into English, but Mackenzie (2013, p.38/9) explains it can be conceived of as 'both an inherited right and an evolving right to the land'. However, this right is not one of ownership. It is more a case of belonging. And this sense of belonging, while reciprocal to an extent, runs deepest from land to man, rather than the other way around: the crofter belongs to the land, the land does not belong to the crofter. He is a part of it in the same way as other natural elements are, and is therefore an invaluable part of the processes that sustain it.

The idea of an environment in which human beings are, and have been, an integral and positive part directly challenges both the 'last wilderness' image of the Highlands and Islands the sporting estates seek to promote and the conversation view of a fragile nature, requiring a protective distance from the works of man. Mc Morran et al.

(2014, p.25) draw on conversations with local inhabitants to give voice to this challenge:

'I don't see our land as wild . . . because I live in it . . . I see remnants of past houses from people who lived there hundreds of years ago and I see a land that has been used for thousands of years.'

Similarly, MacDonald (1998) explains that crofters conflicts with conservationists, over issues such as raptor numbers and environmental designations, are particularly difficult to disentangle as the concept of 'nature' participants rely on are tied to these different narratives. More recently, in its response to Scottish Natural Heritage's consultation on the mapping of 'Core Areas of Wild Land' in Scotland, The Crofting Commission explicitly invoked the concept of *dùthchas* to argue against the mapping process, which it felt would 'render invisible the people who have managed that land for many generations and who continue to manage it in the present and for the future.' (The Crofting Commission, 2013).

These examples show the influence these differing narratives can have on policy discussions. In the current neoliberal climate this integrated view of nature and society can be difficult to promote. For instance, MacDonald (1998, p.242) notes that this narrative can limit crofters, as its resistance to the concept of wilderness makes competition difficult in a market 'conditioned to the tourist gaze'. However, Mackenzie (2006; 2013) shows that the process of land reform and community ownership can interrupt this neoliberal model and provide political space for the *dùthchas* narrative to grow. She points particularly to the replanting of 'native' trees as a process which physically exposes the untruth of the 'natural state' narrative (2103, p.88-94), and the opportunity for community-owned wind energy production to shift renewable energy out of the conservationist or capitalist discourses and recast it as a continuation of the crofters' worked landscape (2006, p.392-395).

2.3.3 Conservationists: this fragile land

As with the two preceding interpretations of the Scottish environment, the narrative of the conservationist draws on a particular viewing of history and ecology to position its advocates as the most appropriate managers of the land. Toogood (1995) explains this narrative relies on the concept of an ecological/historical benchmark: an unspecified point in the past when Scotland's landscapes embodied a true state of

naturalness. Couched in language that is 'rationalistic, technocratic and managerialist' (Toogood, 1995, p.104), it nevertheless shares with the landowners' view an image of rural Scotland as a place at its best when largely empty (MacDonald, 1998, p.241).

Moving away from the hierarchical view of ecology endorsed by sporting estates (Lorimer, 2000, p.417), the conservationist promotes an image of a fragile landscape, where stability and prosperity relies on the maintenance of a careful balance. MacDonald (1998, p.241) argues that this process of 'scientization' disempowers the local populace by presenting the protection of self-defined notions of 'biodiversity' and 'natural heritage' as being above question. Mackenzie (2006, p.389) refers to this as a 'colonizing ethic' which promotes a binary separation of society and nature. Its most obvious incarnation in policy is found, she adds, in the environmental designations laid over rural Scottish landscapes. Using North Harris as her example – it being wholly encompassed by the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area and containing both a Site of Special Scientific Interest and an EU Special Area of Conservation – these designations are said to act as a form of 'political technology' which 'removes or attempts to remove from the discursive field competing claims to the land' (Mackenzie, 1996, p.388).

Chenevix-Trench & Philip (2001), however, present a much closer relationship between conservationists and local/crofting communities. Using the example of the Sandwood Estate – bought by The John Muir Trust (a prominent conservation NGO) but ran by a community committee – they argue that nature conservation can be based on an engaged and active local population. They report that the JMT's conservation manager's aim was to create a situation where the land could be fully transferred into the hands of the community, as this represented the best prospects for long-term protection and promotion of the environment (Chenevix-Trench & Philip 2001, p.150). This, and the numerous examples of conservation bodies partnering with local residents to put land into community ownership (as in North Harris, The Isle of Eigg, and Knoydart), suggests that the stereotypical narrative of conservationists separating society from nature is flexible and recognises an aspiration for possible futures, as well as its appreciation for ecological pasts.

In summary, while not universally attributable in all instances, these three generalised narratives continue to frame the majority of debates over the proper value and use of the Scottish environment, its landscapes and wildlife. All three narratives presented rely on particular readings of Scottish history, and on particular

conceptions of humanity's impact on, or place within, nature. They use these histories to support claims to represent the 'authentic' or 'true' nature of the Scottish rural environment, and of being 'closest' to that true nature. However, the process of land reform, and particularly the momentum behind community ownership, disrupts these narratives by creating a new player on the stage, offering new opportunities for both partnerships and conflicts. The resolutions of these conflicts and the results of joint ventures have the potential to recast Scotland's environments once again. What form this melding of traditions will produce is not immediately apparent and therefore poses the question: Has the experience of community ownership produced new environmental narratives and, if so, what policy outcomes might be expected to result?

SECTION 3: METHDOLOGY

As the focus of this research was on subjective, personal interpretations of the environment it was necessary to gather first-hand accounts from people living in, or strongly connected to, areas of community landownership in Scotland. Field research was therefore essential. However, a number of other research methods were also employed in order to better understand the local contexts these personal narratives were being constructed in. The design of this research strategy and the reasoning behind it will be explained in the section below.

3.1 Case Study Strategy

The project aimed to investigate the impact of community landownership on environmental perspectives and environmental engagement opportunities. Understanding *how* community ownership influences individual and group attitudes to their natural surroundings and *why* it does so (or does not) were the central research goals. An exploratory case study strategy was therefore the most appropriate approach to these goals. As Yin (1994, p.6-9) explains, a case study approach is particularly suited to explore these kinds of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, especially when posed with reference to a currently evolving topic, such as community landownership. The below research strategy aims to take advantage of the scope for collecting data from a range of sources and by a range of methods – within the limitations of the time and resource constraints engendered by the nature of the project – to provide a robust, replicable data pool.

3.2 Selecting Research Sites

In concert with the above desk based literature review (Section 2), existing community land organisations were assessed for suitability as research locations. Community Land Scotland, the umbrella body for the Scottish Land Reform movement, publish on their website a list of 47 member trusts.² Of these, 22 have successfully purchased land. These 22 trusts were reviewed via online research to identify the most suitable research sites. In addition, as not all community landowners

² <http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/index.php/home/5>

are members of Community Land Scotland, further online research was carried out into a number of other trusts. Preliminary contact was then made with trust staff at the selected sites to ensure the feasibility of the proposed research and to gain buy-in from the community trust.

To increase the reliability and robustness of the approach, the research was split over multiple sites. Following the model used by Mackenzie et al. (2004) and McMorran et al. (2014), four community trusts were selected. The locations of these sites are shown in Fig. 3.1, with summary information on each trust presented in Table 3.1. These trusts were selected due to their differing areas (in hectares), sizes of population, length of time since buy-out/lease and previous land holding arrangements. Trusts are similar however in that the land they own was all purchased with outside funding assistance, all are limited companies with charitable status and all have boards of directors drawn from the local community (with some including additional stakeholders from outwith the immediate local community). In addition, reviewing of trust websites and publically available publications confirmed that each of the four community landowners had undertaken prominent environmental projects which could be used to focus field investigations. While sharing a number of key characteristics, the four cases thus capture the amorphous character of community landownership in Scotland, as noted in the Literature Review above, and provide many potential focal points through which personal environmental perspectives can be examined.

Figure 3.1 Research Site Locations



Table 3.1 Research Site Summaries.

Figures adapted from Mackenzie 2013 (p.2+6), with additional information taken from trust websites.

Community Trust	Area in Hectares	Population	Date of Acquisition	Previous Owner
The North Harris Trust	Initial purchase: 22,267. Including Loch Seaforth Estate: 25,304 Including Scalpay: 25,900	704	Initial purchase: 2003. Loch Seaforth purchase: 2006 Scalpay merger: 2012	Private owners: Jonathan Bulmer (North Harris), H�el�ene Panchaud (Loch Seaforth), Fred Taylor (Scalpay).
The West Harris Trust	7,225	123	2010	Scottish Government
Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)	22,662	2,139	2007	Private owner: Galson Estate Ltd
Culag Community Woodland Trust	Culag Woods: 40* Little Assynt Estate: 1,190	0	Culag Woods: 1992* Little Assynt Estate: 2000	Culag Woods: Joint ownership: Vestey Family & Local Authority* Little Assynt Estate: Private owner: Vestey Family

*The Culag Community Woodland Trust was established in 1992 to manage the Culag Woods on a 50 year lease from the Vestey Family and the Highland Council. The Trust then purchased the Little Assynt Estate in 2000, becoming a fully-fledged community landowner.

3.3 Data Gathering

The main portion of the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. This data was augmented by field observations in each of the sites and the collecting and analysing of local publications. The replication across four sites aimed to increase the robustness of the findings by giving the opportunity for counter or correlative narratives to be uncovered.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

A purposive approach to identifying interview subjects was used to give the best chance of capturing a wide range of views and exploring the key environmental narratives identified in the literature review. Due to their details being publically available, in each case initial contact was made with staff members of the trust. Once their buy-in had been secured further individuals were recommend by those staff and sampling proceeded from these initial contacts via snowballing (whereby further interviewees were identified through discussion or correspondence with the initial interviewees). To mitigate against the propensity for interviewees to recommend further contacts who hold similar views to themselves, the importance of collecting a diverse range of views was stressed to initial interviewees before asking for recommendations.

In total fourteen interviews of between forty-five and eighty minutes were completed. Details of those spoken to are given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Summary of Interviewees

Interviewees	Number	Representing
Trust Directors	3	The North Harris Trust, The Culag Community Woodlands Trust, The West Harris Trust
Trust Staff	5	The North Harris Trust, The Culag Community Woodlands Trust, The West Harris Trust, The Galson Estate Trust
Environmental Professionals	5	The RSPB, The John Muir Trust, Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape, Scottish Natural Heritage, local ornithologist
Community Land Scotland board member	1	N/A

In addition, a planned interview with a teacher at a primary school within one of the research locations provided an opportunity to conduct a focus group when more staff were available and keen to participate than had been anticipated. This focus group lasted forty-five minutes and involved six education professionals (both teachers and pre-school leaders). The total number of participants in the study was therefore twenty.

Where possible, interviews were completed in the field. However, time and resources required seven of the interviews to be completed via telephone. In all cases (bar one where paper notes were taken at the request of the interviewee) interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. The total interview time was approximately eleven hours and forty minutes and the compiled completed transcripts ran to 78,500 words. Participants were given the option to review and approve the full transcripts before their content was analysed. This last step was taken to both ensure accuracy and to provide an additional safeguard for the anonymity of participants. As the trusts investigated consist of relatively small populations, where (even without naming participants) the source of comments might be recognised through phrasing or particular examples used, it was essential to ensure interviewees were comfortable with the information they provided before including it in the final report.

3.3.2 Location of interviews.

For those interviews completed in person, and where participants' time allowed, the interview location was carefully chosen. In addition to the importance of making interview subjects comfortable and secure, Sin (2003) has shown that the physical space in which interviews take place can influence the information presented and provide opportunities for the researcher to explore how particular viewpoints and attitudes translate into action. Anderson (2004 p.258) explains that by performing interviews while accompanying environmental activists on informal walks (or 'bimbles') through the countryside around a protest camp, rather than in the camp itself, he was able 'to exploit the potential of the environment to hold activist's knowledge and trigger memory'. In doing so he was able to link the more abstract feelings expressed by participants to physical examples in the landscape, both giving greater context to their words and sharing observations of environmental change in action.

To capitalise on this opportunity, three interviews were carried out at environmental projects either developed by, or ran in conjunction with, community trusts (these were the North Harris Eagle Observatory, the Loch Stiapabhat Wildlife Observatory and the Little Assynt Tree Nursery). In addition, the focus group with school teachers – which focused on opportunities for engaging young people with environmental activities – took place in a classroom at the end of the school day, allowing interviewees to use examples of pupils' work as focal points for the discussion.

Different interview questions were used for different interviewees to take account of their different roles, expertise and experiences. However, questions were drawn from the following thematic groups:

- Community identity(ies)
- Community ownership and young people
- Economic necessity and environmental responsibility
- Environmental management & engagement
- Environmental projects
- Land, history and culture
- Partnerships
- Renewable energy
- Visions of the future
- Wildlife

By following a semi-structured approach these key themes could be covered while allowing interviewees to expand on examples and explore interesting areas not covered by the question list.

3.3.3 Triangulation: observations and additional documents

While the time at each site was not sufficient for true ethnographic research, in order to provide a measure of triangulation a number of additional activities were undertaken to observe first-hand the projects and works undertaken by each trust. These included direct observation via attending a publically advertised eagle spotting walk with one of the trust rangers, an informal tour of two trust areas accompanied by a staff member, independent visiting of trust projects (including native reforestation projects and wind farm sites) and two local heritage exhibitions, and a number of hikes utilizing trust promoted walking routes. In addition, leaflets and other publications produced by the trusts, associated partners and local media were collected for subsequent textual analysis. Further documentation was also provided by some interviewees. This included:

- Trust publications
- An independent economic assessment of community ownership commissioned by Community Land Scotland
- An unpublished draft report on deer management

Photographs of numerous trust commissioned natural/cultural heritage interpretation boards were also collected to allow similar analysis. A full list of such items is given in Appendix 1.

A journal for collecting field notes was also completed. Following the system recommended by Bernard (1988), notes were separated into Methodological, Descriptive and Analytical entries. Notes were recorded at the end of each day of field research (with some additional entries made during 'down-time' in the middle of the day) and after each telephone interview. This process gave the opportunity to review the interview strategy while it was underway, allowing information gained from initial participants to inform future questioning, and gave mental space for making thematic linkages and comparisons between individual interviews. The key themes

which emerged from this proto-analysis in turn helped refine the questions used in latter interviews, narrowing the range of issues discussed, but increasing the focus and opportunity for the development of nuance.

SECTION 4: RESULTS

This section begins with an overview of the four research sites, giving details on their founding, their aims and organisational structures, and significant environmental projects undertaken since coming into community ownership. Factual information was drawn from Trust websites, with clarification on some factual points provided by conversations in the field or the referenced literature. This is followed by reflection on challenges encountered during data collection and the influence these have had on the final results of the study. Section 4.3 then presents the main findings of the project, grouping the data gathered across all sites under illustrative themes and particular points of environmental focus.

4.1 Research Sites

4.1.1 The North Harris Trust

The North Harris Trust was established in 2003, purchasing the North Harris Estate from the then owner, cider magnate Jonathan Bulmer. The purchase was achieved through a joint venture with the private investor Ian Scar-Hall, with the community trust purchasing the majority of the 22,000 hectare estate and Mr Scar-Hall buying Amhunnisuidhe Castle, its immediate surrounds (some 600 acres) and the castle's associated salmon fishing rights. The majority of funding was provided by the Scottish Land Fund, with a supplementary contribution received from The John Muir Trust. A supplementary purchase of the neighbouring Loch Seaforth Estate in 2006 from H el ene Panchaud by the North Harris Trust extended its land holdings to 25,000 hectares. This portion of largely crofted land had traditionally formed part of the North Harris Estate, but was retained by Ms Panchaud when she sold the rest of the estate to Mr Bulmer in 1994 as it was perceived to have high value mineral rights (Mackenzie 2013. p63). A second extension to the community estate was made in 2012 when the residents of the Isle of Scalpay were gifted the island by the then owner, London restaurant owner Fred Taylor. Scalpay residents then voted in a local referendum to join in partnership with the North Harris Trust, increasing the Trust's landholdings to a total of 25,900 hectares (The North Harris Trust 2014).

The population of North Harris is approximately seven hundred people. Around half live in the town of Tarbert, with the remaining population scattered among small

coastal townships. As noted by several interviewees this population is a significant reduction on the number of people who lived in the area previously. This decline is evident when traveling around Harris from the numerous abandoned settlements visible.

Crofting land is concentrated around the exterior of the island, while the interior and upland areas are largely classed as deer forest (Mackenzie 2013. p63). North Harris is also subject to several environmental designations, with 13,000 hectares classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) for its wet heath environments, and a Special Protection Area (SPA) for golden eagles (Scottish Natural Heritage 2011). The entirety of the island is also contained within the South Lewis, Harris and North Uist National Scenic Area.

The aim of the Trust is to:

‘To achieve the regeneration and development of the North Harris community by managing the North Harris Estate as an area of outstanding wild and rugged beauty, through local participation and working with other partners where appropriate, all for the benefit of the local community and the wider public.’ (The North Harris Trust 2014)

Its objectives include:

- To formulate a strategy for community development with full participation of the community;
- To manage, conserve and develop the assets of the estate in a sustainable manner;
- To keep North Harris wild and beautiful by safeguarding and enhancing the environment and managing this in ways that benefit the local community and the general public;
- To facilitate the enjoyment of the natural heritage by enabling open responsible access for all.³

The North Harris Trust is led by a board of thirteen locally elected directors and one additional director representing the John Muir Trust. Of these thirteen, four are drawn from the central town of Tarbert, three from the Isle of Scalpay and one director is

³ For a full list of Trust objectives see: <http://www.north-harris.org/the-trust/our-aims/>

chosen by each of the six remaining defined townships on the estate. The Trust also employs eight staff and has a dedicated office in Tarbert.

Since taking ownership of the land in March 2003 the Trust has undertaken several environmentally focused projects including maintenance of the estate's path network to enable and encourage access on traditional walking routes, the installation of six cultural and environmental interpretation boards at key visitor sites, native tree planting in conjunction with the Woodland Trust, and the building of a golden eagle observatory in Glen Meavaig. The Trust employs a Ranger to encourage engagement with, and enjoyment of, the local environment. It also runs the annual Harris Mountain Festival, a week-long celebration of the mountains of Harris including guided walks, talks and presentations, and mountain skills training workshops.

In addition, in order to assist the Trust in meeting its environmental management obligations in designated areas and control grazing by its 1100-1400 strong red deer herd, members of the local community run an independent deer stalking club, The Harris Stalking Club.

4.1.2 The West Harris Trust

Having received funding assistance from the Big Lottery Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise Community Land Unit, the Tighean Innse Gall Housing Association and from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), The West Harris Trust purchased 7000 hectares of crofting land from the Scottish Government in January 2010. Due to being in public, rather than private, ownership the transfer of the land was undertaken using the provisions of the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act 1997. The area includes large inland areas and extensive beaches, popular with visitors and locals alike. The Trust was formed by the collaboration of five crofting townships on the West Harris coast: Losgaintir, Seilebost, Horgabost, Na Buirgh and Sgarasta Mhor. Together these townships contain a modest population of one hundred and twenty people (including children). The land covered by the West Harris Trust is adjacent to the North Harris Trust.

Despite the land being entirely owned by the Scottish Government, it was reported that the buy-out process was more difficult to negotiate than had been the case with the private owners of North Harris and Loch Seaforth:

'It was quite an eye-opener actually I must admit. It struck me that the buy-out process for West Harris – buying from the Scottish Government – was far more complex in one element than the North Harris buy-out, which had involved buying part of the estate from an absentee, octogenarian landowner based in Switzerland, who had her company registered in Panama. We managed to buy that bit of land much quicker than West Harris could from the Scottish Government – which was supposedly a willing seller.' (Trust staff member)⁴

The three aims of the Trust are to:

- Revitalize the community by attracting new residents and creating new housing and employment opportunities;
- Create environmentally sustainable energy for the community via small hydro and micro-wind projects;
- Conserve and increase understanding of our stunning natural and cultural heritage (The West Harris Trust 2014a).

The Trust is led by a board of ten directors - out of which six are active crofters - and employs two staff.

Since taking ownership of the area the trust has undertaken a number of environmentally significant projects including the production of an information leaflet on the wildlife and habitats in the area, the installation of a 50kw wind turbine on the Scarista common grazing and the holding of a beach festival, including guided walks along the coast to spot sea birds. In August 2012 the Trust signed a partnership agreement with the John Muir Trust, whereby the two organisations will provide support and assistance to each other in conserving the environments of West Harris (The West Harris Trust 2014b). So far John Muir volunteers have assisted with the planting of 8000 trees on common grazing land, coastal protection work and the removal of derelict fencing.

⁴ Note on the attributing of direct quotes: in order that comments can be consider in context of their source direct quotes are attributed to one of the interview groupings noted in Fig. 3.2. Exception to this is made where it was felt to do so would risk violating the promise of anonymity made to participants. In such cases quotes are unattributed. In a limited number of cases where the content of the statement is purely factual, contains reference to the source and has not been judged to be of a potentially sensitive nature direct attribution is made.

4.1.3 Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)

The Galson Estate Trust contains the largest population of the four sites visited, covering some 2,100 people. It is also the second largest site, behind North Harris, with a total area under community ownership of 23,000 hectares. The land is largely held under crofting tenure and includes Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Most notably the Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve (also protected by SSSI designation) is recognised as an internationally important site for bird migrations, being the last stop for important species (such as Whooper Swan, Teal, Wigeon and Pink-Footed Geese) head across the Atlantic Ocean to breeding grounds in Iceland, Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. Corncrakes also make us of the Loch, particularly earlier in the year (Scottish Natural Heritage 2011b).

In contrast to the other sites visited, the purchase of the Galson area was undertaken by the community in the face of stiff resistance from the former private owner, Galson Estate Ltd. After four years of community consultation and rejected bids to the landowners, the community submitted an application to Scottish Ministers under Part 3 of the Land Reform Act (Mackenzie 2013, p.143) to try to force the sale. The situation was further complicated by a proposal from Lewis Wind Power to build a two hundred turbine wind farm on part of the site. Local public opinion was strongly against the proposed development (Mackenzie 2013. p144), and when the time came to vote on the buy-out eighty five per cent voted in favour, taken from a seventy two per cent turnout (The Galson Estate Trust 2014a). In the end, the threat of a forced buy-out under the Land Reform Act was sufficient to bring the private owner to the negotiating table and a settlement was reached to allow the Galson Estate Trust to take ownership of the land. Funding was raised from applications to the Scottish Land Fund, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and from the community itself.

The Trust's overall aim is:

'To promote for the public benefit rural regeneration, following principles of sustainable development, where "sustainable development" means development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, the development of the areas of social and economic deprivation within the Galson Estate area of the Isle of Lewis, for the benefit of the Galson Crofting Community.' (The Galson Estate Trust 2014b)

Its objectives include:

- The relief of poverty in such ways as may be thought fit.
- The advancement of education, training or retraining, particularly amongst unemployed people, in providing unemployed people with work experience and the advancement of education in the benefits of sustainable development.
- The provision of housing for those who are in condition of need and the improvement of housing in the public sector and charitable ownership.
- To develop or alternatively develop through other agencies, the development of the infrastructure and communication links within the Galson community for the benefit of the general public.
- The protection and conservation of the environment. (The Galson Estate Trust 2014b)

The Trust is led by ten locally elected directors, who meet once a month to discuss estate issues. The Trust also incorporates two subsidiary companies, Galson Energy Ltd and Galson Estate Trading Ltd, who have five and three directors respectively (Galson Estate Trust 2014c). The Trust currently employs seven staff, including a graduate placement provided in partnership with the ScotGrad programme.

Environmentally related projects undertaken by the Trust thus far include the building of a new wildlife observatory at the Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve, the organising of a series of wildlife spotting and environmental education events (in partnership with local experts, the John Muir Trust and the RSPB) and the construction of a community owned wind farm, to consist of three 900kw turbines.

4.1.4 The Culag Community Woodland Trust

The Culag Community Woodland Trust was formed in 1992 and is the longest running community trust visited for this research. Initially the Trust was created to manage the 40 hectare Culag Woodland, situated immediately adjacent to the village of Lochinver. The woods were leased by the Trust from the Highland Council and the private owners, the Vestey Family, for a period of fifty years (Culag Community Woodland Trust 2014).

In 2000 the Trust purchased the Little Assynt Estate, on the road leading from Lochinver to Loch Assynt, from the Vestey Family. The purchase was made possible by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Community Land Unit. This estate covers 1,200 hectares but has no resident population. It contains lochs, glens, areas of remnant woodland and areas of newly planted native trees.

The overall focus of the Culag Woods Community Trust, across both sites, is to build partnerships with other Assynt organisations in order to create opportunities for:

- Employment and training of local people;
- Improvements in well-being for locals and visitors;
- Encouraging education about the area's natural environment. (Culag Community Woodland Trust 2014).

The Trust is run by twelve directors drawn from the local community and employs one member of staff. It also has a group of volunteers who carry out woodland maintenance on a fortnightly basis throughout the year (excluding the busy summer tourist season).

Environmental activities undertaken by the Trust include path maintenance and forestry operations in the Culag Woods, partnerships with local schools to provide space for outdoor education, and the construction of an All Abilities Path around the Little Assynt Estate. The Trust works closely with the local Highland Council Ranger Service, also based in Lochinver, and partners of the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape project, who operate a native tree nursery on the Little Assynt Estate.

4.2 Limitations and research challenges

On undertaking the field research a number of unexpected challenges were encountered. Although this project did not aim to produce a fully representative picture of environmental interpretations and opportunities in the community land movement in Scotland, it is important to recognise that manoeuvring through these challenges has introduced some new bias into the results.

4.2.1 One head, many hats

When arranging and conducting interviews it was found that the majority of interviewees held, or had held, multiple positions both within and out-with the trusts being considered. For instance, one member of staff at the West Harris Trust had previously worked for the North Harris Trust. Similarly, the RSPB Conservation Officer had held a previous position as a Ranger at the North Harris Trust and now worked out of office space shared with the West Harris Trust. These dual roles and previous connections introduced unexpected dynamics into interview settings: on the one hand they allowed interviewees to make useful comparisons between trusts/external organisations, but on the other hand it appeared at points that the sense of shared loyalty persisting across roles made some participants hold back from making overtly critical comments.

In addition, when analysing the interview transcripts in some instances it has proved difficult to disentangle the role-specific voice from the personal. Thus the groupings of interviewees into Directors, Trust Staff, Environmental Professionals, Teachers and Community Land Scotland Representative (given in the Methodology section above), is but one possible grouping and may not accurately reflect the way interviewees would group themselves. This finding chimes with that of Mc Morran et al (2014) and Brown (2012), who also highlight that the classification of subjects in close-knit community settings (either geographical or recreational) can be a matter of interpretation as they often have multiple roles and could be categorised in a number of different ways.

The complexity these multiple roles can introduce was addressed directly in an interviewee with the John Muir Trust's Western Isles Area Manager. As part of his role he also serves on the board of the North Harris Trust and below explains the different obligations each position puts on him:

'[W]hile I am the John Muir Trust's director [on the NHT board], my primary duty is to the help support the management of the North Harris Trust for the benefit of the community of North Harris, and not for the benefit of the John Muir Trust.'

4.2.2 Native Voices

As noted in Section 2.2.2, discussions of environmental disputes in Scottish rural communities often include a distinction being drawn between native inhabitants that have grown up in an area and those who have moved into the community, commonly referred to as ‘incomers’. While the criteria for qualifying as an incomer or native are not objectively fixed, part of this research aimed to explore this distinction and investigate whether commonly made assertions of these group’s positions were reflected in the views of those living on, or connected to, community land. Discussion of these perceived differences will be taken up below, but for the moment it must be noted that of those persons interviewed, the great majority did not class themselves as native to the areas in which they lived. This included persons who had been living in the areas in question for some decades. Only one interviewee explicitly identified himself as being ‘born and bred’ in his community.

Repeated assertions were made by interviewees of the importance of natives’ historical connections to their local area in shaping their environmental perspectives:

[T]here are people born and brought up on the islands who are the most passionate advocates of a place imaginable. They just love it and wouldn’t dream of living anywhere else.’ (Environmental professional)

‘These families have often been associated with these pieces of land as far as recorded generations go back... So you also have the tie to the land even if you’re not using it and don’t have a real interest in it. There’s always: this is where my family’s from and belongs to it.’ (Trust director)

‘[A] lot of tenancies will be passed down through the family across generations, so that will add to the strength of connection with that piece of land.’ (Environmental professional)

However, the low number of self-identifying native participants means viewpoints attributed to this group below are largely based on secondary reporting of attitudes rather than direct individual reflection. Part of the reason for this lack was the challenge of moving through the informal networks that bind small communities. Limited experience on the part of the researcher and the short time spent at each research site meant it was not possible to penetrate some local networks and reach as broad a range of community members as would have been preferred.

4.3 Main themes encountered

Comments indicative of the three common framing narratives discussed in the literature review (the conservationist, crofter and private landlord perspectives) were expressed throughout the interviews, with participants often drawing on key traits of these interpretive positions to qualify their relations with, and perceptions of, their local environment. For example, two trust directors strongly emphasised the importance of their area's crofting heritage to explain the high quality of its current ecological environment:

'[C]rofters have been doing what environmentalists think should be done now for generations. So it's sensitive, sustainable use of the land.' (Trust director)

'[T]he people here have made this [the local environment] what it is and it's regarded by most people as very high value... A sustainable community is what the crofting community has been to the islands.' (Trust director)

The idea of personal identity being tied to the land through the experience of working on it, indicative of the concept of *dùthchas*, was also expressed:

'[T]here is a feeling for land that's either there or it's not there, and it seems to be strong in crofting areas in particular. When you work the land you're part of it, you're part of the whole nature of the land. I don't think you should look at the natural environment and the people any differently.'

The grouping of particular views on appropriate environmental management also followed the framing narratives when interviewees discussed their impression of the motivations of others. Conservations were at times characterised as people who want to return to '*some undeveloped time*' or to resist change and '*just preserve things in aspic*'. In turn, crofters were accused of continuing largely redundant land management practices due to ingrained tradition, defying scientifically based recommendations. Allusions were often made to the care needed on the part of conservation NGOs when proposing change in crofting areas:

'Criticising crofting is a bit like criticising religion over here: you just don't do it. It's held up as fundamental.' (Environmental professional)

While no representatives of private estate owners were spoken to directly, other interviewees spoke of lairds' tendency to promote an image of '*benevolence*' and stewardship. Critical elements of the private owner narrative were also expressed, with some participants characterising such owners as governing over a system of at best '*benign neglect*', or buying land any without consideration of communities living on it:

'[T]hey just buy it as an investment: like a tin of beans. That can't be right.'

These examples show the interpretive webs which have been woven through the landscape of these areas are still used to distil interpretations of appropriate environmental stewardship. However, in instances which highlight the danger of over simplifying community views to fit into categorical models, numerous examples were also found of these common narratives being interrupted.

Rejecting a distinction between 'fully natural' and 'human-influenced' environments the interviewees near unanimously referred to the areas under study as being a mix of semi-wild/semi-managed environments, with human impact a key influence. While some participants characterised the conservationist position as being driven by a belief in restoring the landscape to a truly natural time, before human influence altered it, those self-identifying conservationists spoken to did not express this view:

'Part of it is definitely wild... But I would view it very much as a working landscape as well, that has been created by the way that people have used it over hundreds of years.' (Environmental professional)

Interruptions of the framing narratives were also found within individual interviews, with participants expressing views that ranged across the differing positions. In one encounter a trust director voiced strong support for elements of the crofting position, invoking the criticism of conservation bodies as trying to impose an unrealistic conception of nature on rural communities. However, later in the discussion they explained that they themselves were in fact a member of a prominent conservation body. Similarly, the representatives of conservation bodies spoken to showed clear awareness of the criticisms made of the past approaches by such organisations:

'I think in the past [we have] perhaps been a bit bullish in our partnerships, taking lots of the credit. That's fine but you're maybe not going to be so successful in getting a partnership in the future...' (Environmental professional)

In a rejection of a one-size-fits-all approach, they also displayed a sensitivity to the aims of the communities they were working alongside, recognising the value of long-term partnerships and focusing on common goals:

'I think the other difference here [to managing land owned by the conservation body] is that it's not our land. We don't go around telling North Harris Trust or Galson Trust how to manage their land. We'll make suggestions, and we don't have any qualms about doing that, but we're not going to say at the end of the day we insist you manage it this way, because it's not our land at all. What we try to do is to find common group projects that we can both support and work with the communities to help develop these environmental assets to everyone's benefit.' (Environmental professional)

The emergence, development and disruption of these environmental viewpoints in the four research sites are considered below in the context of specific opportunities and challenges faced by these communities.

4.3.1 The Wind and the Plough

As noted in Section 4.1.3, community resistance to a proposal to construct a large scale wind farm – consisting of over two hundred turbines – by Lewis Wind Power was one of the main motivating factors for the founding of the Galson Estate Trust. One might then assume that this reflected a strong anti-wind farm feeling among the local community. However, on taking ownership of the land one of the flagship projects undertaken by the Trust has been the construction of a 900kw wind turbine, with two more planned to follow. A staff member at the Trust explained that this turnaround was achieved through active and repeated consultation with community stakeholders and by ensuring the community gained the maximum possible benefit from the scheme, not just in terms of revenue created but also by utilizing local contractors where possible. This consultation continued through the construction phase of the project with the Trust actively engaging with commentators on social media (The Galson Estate Trust 2013).

This process of consensus building through repeated rounds of consultation was also used by the West Harris Trust and the North Harris Trust when designing and constructing their own wind power projects. Plans for the development of a wind project at Monan, North Harris, started in 2004 with construction of three turbines to

begin in autumn this year. Knowing that this could be a contentious venture, one interviewee explained that the North Harris Trust continually sought community approval for the design of the project, noting:

'Because it was contentious, all the way through the procedures the community would be asked 'Are you in favour? Are you in favour?' That's the way to handle things that are contentious. It's almost like Switzerland with all its referendums.'

When it came to the final ballot on the project the community returned a vote of ninety eight per cent in favour of the project. This strong showing of support was reported to have eased the passage of planning permission as those community members still opposed to the development, recognising the level of community backing, opted out of making formal objections to the planning authority. It also convinced the John Muir Trust to back the scheme, a position at odds with their management approach on land wholly owned by them. In this instance, the strength of local support – made apparent by the actions of the community landlord – has had a visible impact on a range of actors' attitudes to this environmentally charged project.

However, a member of staff at the North Harris Trust emphasized that the construction of this particular project did not signal an embracing of all possible wind power developments. A larger site, this time offshore, offering significant potential income has not be pursued as its scale is perceived to cause more harm than good to the community. The point of scale of development, as opposed to type of development, and keeping that scale appropriate to the needs of the community, was one encountered across a range of other projects:

'The scale is what can devastate a landscape.' (Trust staff member)

4.3.2 Forging Partnerships

During interviews it was often remarked that due to the strength of crofting heritage and the historical experiences this heritage draws on, communities in the areas visited are traditionally viewed as being suspicious of new management approaches emanating from outside agencies (be they governmental, private interests or from charitable conservation bodies).

'I think that a bit more trust has to be given to communities. They are not the enemy. It's not SNH, it's not RSPB that's preserved this environment: it's the communities that have always been here and I think they need to recognise that.' (Trust director & crofter)

'To understand crofting you have to understand the history of crofting and where it comes from. It does result in a real distrust of any outsiders trying to tell crofters how to manage their land.' (Environmental professional)

However, in contrast to this element of the crofting narrative, the evidence collected from the four trusts showed a wide ranging enthusiasm for building partnerships with outside actors. This was apparent in the co-operative management structure of the North Harris Trust – with one place on the board of directors reserved for a representative of the John Muir Trust – and in the numerous shared projects and events conducted by the trusts and their partners: including co-ordination over the publicizing and running of wildlife watching sessions and nature walks, co-operation over funding for environmental projects such as the Loch Stiapabhat wildlife observatory in Galson, and arrangements for JMT volunteer work parties to assist with a range of environmental management tasks in both North and West Harris. As well as with conservation bodies, these partnerships extend to other community land trusts and neighbouring private estates.⁵

This willingness to bridge traditional divides was especially apparent in the North Harris case, where the fusion of community and private ownership created by the conditions of the original buy-out have led to a close working relationship between the Trust and the privately owned Amhuinnsuidhe Castle. Shared maintenance of stalking paths provides access to the more remote, inland areas of the estate for trust and castle staff, as well as increasing opportunities for visitors to enjoy the wilder

⁵ As seen in Culag Woods Community Trust's participation in the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape partnership.

areas of the estate. Evidence of the friendly relations between trust and estate staff was witnessed first-hand when accompanying the trust ranger to the Glen Meavaig Eagle Observatory and encountering estate staff working on path maintenance on the route to the site. This willingness for active engagement on the part of the Trust was reinforced by the explanation by a trust director of the voluntary seeking of goodwill from the owner of the castle before establishing a community deer stalking initiative, the Harris Stalking Club. This reaching out was not required, the director noted, but it was felt to be in everyone's best interests to encourage collaborative practices where possible. Commenting on wider deer management across the Harris and Lewis area, a representative of Scottish Natural Heritage noted how the North Harris Trust's enthusiastic attitude to building partnerships with neighbouring estates has been instrumental in '*resurrecting*' and '*reinvigorating*' the regional deer management group.

Representatives from both community landowners and conservation bodies noted that these partnerships were built by finding common goals and by sharing a long-term vision for co-operative working. Each showed an awareness of the differing priorities of inhabitants or members, but reported managing to find joint projects which provided mutually beneficial outcomes:

'I think, you know, maybe sometimes we come at it from a different point of view. At the end of the day a lot of the community trusts are trying to generate income – which is difficult in the Western Isles – whereas our business is conservation. So we're not always coming at it from the same perspective or the same start point but I think the end point we're striving towards is the same.' (Environmental professional)

Thus, the characteristic narrative of a closed, insular rural community, based on a strong preference for historically grounded practices and traditional land management approaches, is interrupted by opportunities created by community ownership. By hosting a plurality of perspectives on environmental management community trusts can become forums for the sharing of ideas and democratic spaces where partnerships can be forged:

'Community landowning areas quite often become the focus for other areas and other activities, like SNH coming to the community landowner to work up schemes between them.'

Recognising the value derived from these initial encounters was reported to have caused one conservation body to place greater emphasis on the role of community partnerships in achieving its goals:

'I think we also recognise [now] that if you want to conserve species and habitats on a landscape scale then you can't do it by buying reserves. We would never be able to buy enough land to preserve species on a large scale. It's essential to work with other landowners and communities in the long-term.' (Environmental professional)

This is not to suggest that there are no tensions within these relationships, with some participants reporting disagreement in principle between partners. However, the general open structure across the variety of community models allows selective links to form around points of common focus, creating more opportunities to explore co-operative projects.

An example of this can be seen in the recently constructed Loch Staipabhat wildlife observatory, built by the Galson Estate Trust. Interviewees reported how the impetus for the project came from a community of local birdwatchers in North Lewis.

Recognising the shared interest, funding was sourced with the help of the John Muir Trust Area Manager. Finally, drawing on the experiences of another community trust, construction was undertaken by a local work group originally trained to help with the building of a similar facility at the North Harris Trust (the North Harris Eagle Observatory). These partnerships have continued after construction with the JMT, the RSPB and local birdwatchers jointly arranging a programme of events at the new facility, and a leaflet published by both community trusts showcasing these events and the two observatory projects. Commenting on the project as a whole, a member of the local bird watching group emphasised that the co-ordinating role played by the Galson Estate Trust was central to the success of this long sought after project.

'The change over from a private estate to a community trust gave us a much better chance of getting [the observatory project] going.' (Environmental professional)

4.3.3 Future-focused

This enthusiasm for building strong partnerships reveals another distinct aspect of the developing narrative of community landownership. Despite, as noted above, the community land movement in Scotland having its roots in cultural memories of the

divisive history of the Clearances, the motivation to right past wrongs was largely absent from the interviews and other data collected. While this study did not include community landowners with the strongest (or most high profile) grievances against the old private landlord system (such as the Isle of Eigg), this particular view was repeated by the representative of Community Land Scotland with reference to the movement as a whole:

'You'll find some people in community land areas who think it is probably the worst thing that's ever happened. Just as a point of principle they don't believe in it. And you'll find that some people are doing it to right wrongs, and you'll find others are doing it because they see opportunities for themselves and their children to come, and I think the bulk of the people are in the last category – quite substantially so.'

The language used in discussions and publications, with great emphasis placed on new opportunities, long-term visions and securing a sustainable, vibrant future gave voice to a feeling of being future-focused. There is a respect for the past, but the path ahead will not be bound by it. While traditional crofting is likely to remain an integral part of society in these areas (if a small part of the economy), questions on visions for the future gave rise to a wide diversity of views. Developing tourism (across many different sub-sectors) and an embracing of high technology in the form of renewable energy and the opportunities afforded by improved internet coverage and remote working were the most cited examples. Previously restricted to agriculture and sporting pursuits, the environments in these areas are increasingly recognised as having to balance the requirements of everything from bird watching to Segway tours (both activities individual interviewees noted had the potential to draw increasing interest from visitors).

4.3.4 Attracting young families, engaging young people

A strong emphasis was placed on the importance of attracting and retaining young families in order to reverse population decline and address the difficulties created by an increasingly aged population. The scale of the problem was captured in an anecdote drawn from a trust board meeting and repeated by an interviewee:

'The crofting community is very aging. The entire community is very aging. A few years ago, at one of the board meetings, one of the directors said: "You know, there are more funerals this week than there have been births in the last twelve months."'

(Environmental professional)

Efforts to improve and increase environmental engagement activities for the young was a method evident across all the research sites used to help address this problem. These activities covered a diverse range: expeditions and environmental heritage trips organised between trust ranger services and local schools, utilising community owned spaces for outdoor education sessions (particularly in the case of Culag Woods), promotion of the John Muir Awards environmental scheme, and the active inclusion of young children in trust projects, such as the designing of a front cover picture for the Galson Estate Trust's events brochure.

As discussed in Section 2.3.2, the ideals of the traditional crofting narrative, captured by the concept of dùthchas, relies on an upbringing involving every day interaction with the land to instil a sense of community identity and shared rights. Several interviewees – including active crofters – however, noted the continuing decline in interest in the agricultural lifestyle on the part of the young.

'[Crofting] is hanging on by... you know... the vast majority of people are over sixty five that are doing it – well over sixty five even – and there's very few to follow it. I just don't see it happening.' (Trust director)

'[T]he younger generation want to do a lot more recreational things that their parents would never have thought of doing: they don't want to be chasing sheep up and down hillsides every evening.' (Trust staff member)

This diverse range of new projects – which have been directly created by the community trusts or rely on their support – provide the potential to reframe these ties to the land, instilling environmental awareness and responsibility from a young age.

'Because one of the key objectives of the Trust is to slow or reverse the ongoing population decline out here, speaking to young people and showing them that there are opportunities here and they don't have to just go away to find opportunity is a big part of what we do. There are actually lots of things people can do here.' (Trust staff member)

It was recognised among participants that the impacts of these generational initiatives cannot be reliably estimated at this stage, but the commitment to improving engagement across a diverse range of activities provides fruitful ground for varied environmental perspectives to grow.

4.3.5 Wildlife Observatories

Of the various trust projects visited the two wildlife observatories – the Loch Stiapabhat bird hide on the Galson Estate and the North Harris Eagle Observatory – provided particularly useful points of focus for investigating the impacts of community ownership on environmental attitudes. Those involved in the planning of both of the projects expressed a hope that the observatories would increase awareness of important local species (and the environments they rely on), as well as promoting them as local assets, creating new economic opportunities:

'[O]ne of the reasons that I have for building that eagle observatory was that if you can keep ahead of things, and show people what an asset they have on the doorstep, then they're less likely to focus on the problems associated with it. So, for example with white tailed eagles you do get a lot of complaints of them taking large numbers of lambs... If you can show what an asset that is and how that species can benefit the local economy, that voice from some people of negativity will be less strong, if you have a lot of people benefiting from it.' (Environmental professional)

'The old [hide at Loch Stiapabhat] was fine but it had been there ten years and its sighting was quite far back from the loch; so we started to look at how we could move it closer, make it bigger, put in a board walk and also put in some innovative interpretation to help entice people that would maybe not thought to have come before.' (Trust staff member)

These projects have garnered impressive levels of interest from visitors and locals, with the North Harris Eagle Observatory estimated to attract 4000 visitors annually.

Extensive positive remarks in the hides' visitor books gave testament to the quality of the projects. Staff at the North Harris Trust explained that consideration was being given to enlarge the car park at their site due to its popularity.

However, doubt was expressed in some quarters of the ability of such projects to overturn deep-seated perceptions of the relative value of wildlife. For example, while participants – including trust staff, crofters and representatives of conservation NGOs – agreed that golden eagles on Harris had faced far less historic persecution than mainland areas, tension was reported and expressed by interviewees between those in favour of promoting eagles and crofters, whose livestock can be a source of prey for large raptors. It was generally not believed that projects such as the Eagle Observatory would directly bridge these divides. Nevertheless, the indirect benefits of the projects – such as the increased tourism they can attract to areas – were believed to hold the potential of changing attitudes in the long-term:

'I think, no. I can't see this changing what a lot of crofters think about eagles, even if they are having very little impact on their own lambs. I think that is quite strongly engrained that eagles are just bastards (laughs). But over time, when they see the amount of enthusiasm and the amount of money that is coming in, maybe it will start them thinking about how they can get money for themselves...' (Environmental professional)

4.3.6 Democratizing deer

A further example of the diverse environmental attitudes given space by community landownership is the Harris Stalking Club. As noted above, after the buy-out of the North Harris Estate the rights to stalk stags on the estate were leased to Amhuinnsuidhe Castle. However, the North Harris Trust remained responsible for the overall management of the 1100 – 1400 strong red deer herd, the satisfactory undertaking of which underpins its land management agreement with Scottish Natural Heritage. Foregoing the traditional management approach of using professional stalkers to control deer numbers, community members established the Harris Stalking Club. The Club consists of approximately twenty five volunteer members (a core of whom have completed the Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 training in deer management and biology). Through an agreement with the Trust the Club takes part in monitoring, culls and deer counts to ensure the maintenance of a healthy herd and of Harris' protected upland environments.

Several interviewees – including environmental professionals and a member of the club itself– referred to the increase in feelings of responsibility for the local environment from club members and on the positive contribution to wider land management this has led to:

'[I]t works very well because if you give people access to a resource that they would have not had previously, or would have had to have poached, then they do take a much more sensible attitude to it...' (Trust staff member)

The club was reported to have the highest number of regularly active volunteers for an environmental project in the Trust and these members have engaged in additional land management activities such as path maintenance. An unpublished report by a previous land manager at the Trust, given to the researcher, reaffirmed the increased feelings of responsibility to the wider environment and also noted a marked reduction in poaching on the estate (MacPherson: Unpublished).

It was openly admitted that some members of the club had engaged in poaching before the land buy-out in 2003. Knowingly bringing ex-poachers into the legitimate management approach again provides evidence of the focus put on future opportunities, rather than past divides, noted above. Furthermore, given its strong association with the financial elite and the aristocracy, noted in Section 2.3.1, this recasting of deer hunting as an activity for the common man provides a clear example of a differing narrative being laid across the land. By utilizing community volunteers rather than professional gamekeepers it is also differentiated from conservationist deer management approaches. Rather than being framed as the enabling of a status sport or the applying of ecological standards, motivations for club membership stressed community responsibility and the opportunity to be actively engaged with their local environment:

'[I]t's hugely to the advantage of the community to give them the responsibility. It's the single largest volunteer effort. I know there's a little bit of benefit in it, but actually financially I'd be better not stalking: I'd be better just buying venison.' (Trust director)

4.3.7 The route head: development opportunities and challenges.

There was wide agreement at the research sites that the tourism sector would play an increasing role in local economies in the years to come. Increasing the total number of visitors and diversifying the range of activities catered for were given as the primary goals, with more nature-based activities seen as presenting a key opportunity for expansion.

'I do think that there is huge potential for tourism here. If you look at Skye, we're still very underdeveloped as far as tourism goes. It's growing a lot already – we can see that year on year – but people are taking a while to catch on to the economic potential of tourism here.' (Environmental professional)

Resiliency created through the enthusiasm to partner with prominent conservation organisations (such as the shared leading of the popular North Harris Eagle Walk between the Trust and the RSPB) and the diversity of skills, knowledge and connections opened up through active community engagement (such as in the North Harris Mountain Festival, West Harris Beach Festival and the informal promotion of the Loch Staipabhat bird hide to the bird watching community by a local enthusiast) have shown how community areas can increase demand:

'[I]f I find a rare bird when I'm back in August, I can pretty much guarantee if it's the first one ever for Britain then the Twitchers will come over and it'll be used by them as well.' (Environmental professional)

As well as increasing capacity, interviewees commented on how the experience of community ownership has provided a significant increase in confidence amongst the communities and question, and that this bodes well for the development of new tourism ventures (along with other business sectors as well).

However, caution was expressed by trust staff and environmental professionals alike over the need to consider the impact of increasing numbers of visitors on local environments. In particular, a perceived lack of appropriate facilities for campervans was noted by interviewees in both Harris and Galson as leading to negative impacts on some of the areas' most iconic spots, the Hushinish beach and the Butt of Ness lighthouse respectively. While stressing the need for such facilities one participant noted they would not like it built near their own property:

'Putting it in a nutshell it's a NIMBY situation. Not in my back yard. I'm a NIMBY and maybe I'm old enough to stick to my principles and to say "Well, why can't I be a NIMBY."'

Conflicting views on the development of historic sites was also noted, with abandoned buildings seen by some as characteristic of an isolated landscape and by others as opportunities for developing new business space.

'No, it's all locked. My personal view is that that is good. It's a selfish view... But from my point of view the great pleasure of the [site] is that it's normally very quite.'

These dual views, supportive of principle but with conditions in practice, hold potential for creating conflict in communities. With trusts aiming to increase development in their areas, the negotiation of the siting of unpopular infrastructure was noted as a challenge that will continually arise. It was hoped the strong consultative process noted above with reference to wind farms, and the open transparent management structure afforded by local leadership will work through these difficulties as they arise.

Participants stressed community landownership requires the dedication of large amounts of time from committed volunteers. Due to this it was cautioned that it was not a model that could be imposed from the outside. Commenting on the elements of a successful community buy-out an ex-director explained:

'I think is the most significant is the community desire. The community has got to want to do it themselves. If they don't want to do it, they shouldn't go anywhere near it. It worries me sometimes that, particularly people looking at it from the outside, want to push capacity, build capacity within communities.' (Trust staff member)

However, participants also explained that running services for the community was an important aspect of life before they became landowners, with volunteering an integral part of the local culture. Examples of community run endeavours included pre-school services, community sports facilities, community festive events and, in Lochinver, the local lifeboat service. While this volunteering spirit provides fertile ground for growing the 'can-do' attitude stressed as important for effective management, it was also noted as containing the seed of potential disruption. With so many other claims on time, attracting new volunteers has proved difficult in some areas:

'You never get a volunteer that's only got one commitment: they've all got loads of commitments.' (Trust director)

While trust staff were reported to significantly reduce the burden on volunteers, even in trusts with paid staff a feeling of strain was expressed by some participants:

'I would say that in the last few years there seems to be a larger number of organisations requiring volunteers – perhaps there always has been – that's the perception at the moment. Everyone's feeling a bit stretched... So that is quite hard going. I think people get worn out.' (Trust staff member)

'[W]e are struggling all the time to keep the number of directors up and everyone we ever get has got other commitments elsewhere too.' (Trust director)

SECTION 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Returning to the research questions set out in Section 1, the primary aim of the study was to investigate the influence of community landownership on environmental perspectives. In order to focus the study three commonly cited environmental narratives used to frame perceptions of the Scottish countryside were introduced. In the results presented above there is clear evidence of a new environmental narrative emerging in areas under community landownership. This narrative is rooted in a commitment to inclusive participation and people centred governance, and is characterised by the development of pluralistic approaches to environmental challenges.

Expression of the pluralistic focus can be seen in attitudes towards a diversity of projects. The development of the Galson wind turbines builds on the evidence presented by Warren & McFadyen (2010) on the principle of community ownership altering attitudes to these often controversial structures. The similar developments at North Harris and West Harris have garnered significant community backing however, as noted by participants, this should not be taken to mean that these community bodies have settled the issue of wind development. The commitment to be directed by the local population means a fixed attitude to any particular kind of development is unlikely. Each new project contains the potential to split communities into different groups, weakening the hold any particular vision has over control of the land.

It is arguable that this melding of environmental narratives has always been present. As noted above, the three commonly cited interpretations of human-nature relationships are not meant to be taken as literal descriptions of closely defined groups. They are a generalisation and a simplification that enables useful discussion. As such, the melding of these narratives may be a result of community landownership's more democratic form of local governance unlocking these disparate voices and giving them a forum through which to be heard.

Such a position would suggest community landowners will, at the beginning of their tenure, experience a period of struggle as proponents of each position form groups and seek to implant their preferred view as the correct measure of environmental responsibility in the new power structure. This would then presumably be followed by cycles of environmental conflict as those holding other views seek to gain greater

influence and those of the first dominant position seek to defend its primacy (Sidaway, 2005, p.49).

However, the structures encountered and the experiences reported tell against this view. The clear commitment to continuing community consultation and open management structure favours consensus and compromise, reducing the likelihood of debates becoming polarised, as seen when objectors to the North Harris wind development did not hold up the formal planning process. The combination of ballots by the full membership and the election of directors provides safeguards against both minority control of the board or a tyranny of the majority situation emerging. For example, a director of the North Harris Trust explained that the weighting of spaces on the board was carefully considered to ensure fair representation across the whole area and different sectors of the community:

'Tarbert kind of dominates Harris, and we intentionally loaded the representation of the rural areas above Tarbert, because Tarbert will always have its voice with the vast majority of the population living here.' (Trust director)

They also explained how engagement with the wider population was a director's primary responsibility as it was important for the people to direct the Trust and not for the Trust to direct the people. This was a view backed up by trust staff:

'If the membership vote against something we're proposing to do we just simply won't do it.' (Trust staff member)

Evidence of these checks and balances in practice can be seen in trusts not covered by this project, as in the case of the Assynt Foundations plans to build a wind farm on its land, as detailed in Mc Morran et al (2014). Here the proposal agreed by directors was rejected by the wider population following a public meeting. This inclusive, democratic approach avoids criticisms of imposed top-down management associated with the conservationist and private ownership narratives, but also gives political space for proponents of these viewpoints to be heard. With decision making power open and accountable, the chance of polarisation in environmental conflicts is reduced and the space for a pluralistic focus is created. As Mackenzie (2006, p.387) notes with reference to North Harris, the re-defining of collective rights has not led to a new 'exclusionary or essentialist claim to the land', but has instead created space for a diversity of interweaving views.

While this inclusive management structure can be said to go some way to addressing concerns over elite-capture that have dogged community-based development ventures (Platteau, 2004), the heavy reliance on volunteers and the difficulty of engaging new (particularly young) people in the running of the trusts presents the possibility of a consolidation of power being created by default rather than design. Sustaining the desire to voluntarily take on such a significant level of responsibility presents a key challenge for community trusts, and one that if unanswered would undermine claims to always provide more long-term stability than private ownership. However, the example of the Stornoway Trust, established in 1923, shows that this is a challenge which has been met successfully in the past.

Community landownership has, therefore, been shown to alter environmental perspectives by introducing a new environmental narrative. This narrative carries traits of previous viewpoints, but differs in important respects. In the first instance, by allowing a diversity of interpretations of nature to co-exist it promotes a diversity as a key principle for the utilizing of the land. The amorphous character of trusts and the differing access to particular resources lends to the rejection of a one-size-fits all approach and forces trusts to repeatedly re-engage with their memberships, each time seeking the closest consensus possible.

The impact of this new narrative was borne out by the diverse approaches to environmental management and the new opportunities created to engage local people and visitors with natural surroundings. The motivation noted above by a participant for his taking part in the Harris Stalking Club – with the emphasis put on responsibility to the wider community - illustrates how community ownership changed what was a practice draped in the finery of the aristocracy and pursued for personal status into a functional land management activity, open to any able enough to take part and directed at the benefit of the wider population. Similarly examples such as the creation of the All Abilities Path at Little Assynt, noted in Section 4.1.4, illustrate how managing land under a democratic system has opened access to the outdoors to marginalised groups. Trust led eagle walks on North Harris lead visitors deep into the hills along paths originally created to serve stalking parties. In both cases the idea of who belongs or who should have access to the landscape are recast, each time with the focus on being extending and encouraging, rather than restricting, access.

By drawing on the skills and knowledge of community members, and – through the locally based directors – providing an easy route to offer input and propose

developments, hidden potential can be unlocked, changing the focus of a trust in unexpected ways. The example of the two wildlife observatories considered above show how community ownership has created the space to explore new approaches to attracting visitors, each holding the potential to greatly shape the character of the area and the way it is presented to prospective visitors.

The likelihood of an increasing role for the tourism sector in the local economy holds the potential to introduce further diversity in environmental engagement activities and wider environmental priorities. Those activities promoted by the trusts visited already show a move away from the consumptive blood sports of the private sporting estate model, with a greater focus on low impact nature-based tourism such as wildlife spotting and hillwalking. The potential to increase such activities was highlighted, at least for the Western Isles, by a recent Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned report (Taylor et al 2010). Agreeing on the appropriate level of investment in tourism infrastructure and the number of visitors landscapes can sustainably accommodate will require engagement with a wide range of community stakeholders. Satisfying such a diversity of aims is likely to strengthen the pluralistic narratives in the areas, as development expands through balance, consensus and compromise.

The enthusiasm for working in partnership with other organisations is built on a similar attitude to compromise and shared goals. This has already been seen to create new approaches to environmental management, such as in the Coigach Assynt Living Landscape project, and to allow for the development of standalone projects/events such as the North Harris Eagle Walks. As community trusts become more established opportunities for partnerships will continue to emerge. It was noted during interviews that the feasibility of a wild life trail running the length of the Hebrides was being considered by the RSPB. Given the large proportion of the land area in the Western Isles under community ownership this project alone holds great potential to draw on the experiences and skills of numerous trusts, with the potential of creating a new aspect of shared identity and interest. The challenge posed to trusts is in balancing the needs of partners against those of their own community where conflicts inevitably arise. As with between residents and tourists, squaring the aims of partnerships with those of locals will be a continually evolving process, requiring repeated engagement with questions of what are appropriate uses of the natural environment.

Community landownership therefore carries the potential to recast Scotland's environments and reconfigure the activities related to them. It does so not by imposing a fixed interpretation of nature over the land, but by allowing this most foundational of resources to be governed by transparent, democratic structures, with strong local accountability. The result is a management strategy which lends itself to pursuing a diverse range of opportunities – proposed from both within and out with the parent community – and approaches these opportunities with a shared spirit of consensus and compromise. Whether such an approach will deliver better environmental outcomes is not within the remit of this study, but it bears noting that the very question of what constitutes 'positive' environmental outcomes is disrupted by this emerging narrative of community control.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Additional documents, interpretation boards, exhibitions and online sources.

Additional documents

Title	Type	Published by
The North Harris Eagle Observatory	A3 triple-fold information leaflet.	The North Harris Trust
Harris & Lewis Guided Walks and Events 2014	Information booklet.	The North Harris Trust, the Galson Estate Trust & the RSPB.
Introduction to North Harris	A3 triple-fold information leaflet.	The North Harris Trust
The North Harris Trust: 10 Years of Community Ownership 2003-13	Retrospective summary of 10 years of community ownership. A5 glossy booklet.	The North Harris Trust
Harris Wildlife	Guide to wildlife and environments of Harris. A5 glossy booklet.	The North Harris Trust & Scottish Natural Heritage.
Introduction to Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)	A3 triple-fold information leaflet.	Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)
Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve	A4 triple-fold information leaflet.	Scottish Natural Heritage & Comunn Eachdraidh Nis (Ness Historical Society)
Galson Estate Trust Events 2014	A4 triple-fold information leaflet.	Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)
Community Management of a Deer Herd	Unpublished report by former Trust Land Manager on community deer management.	N/A
Island Visitor Survey 2012-2013: Outer Hebrides Summary of Results	Annual tourism survey of visitors' attitudes and opinions.	VisitScotland (http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/OH%20factsheet%20FINAL.pdf)

Nature Based Tourism in the Outer Hebrides: Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report 353.	Report on the potential for Nature Based Tourism in the Outer Hebrides	Scottish Natural Heritage (http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/353.pdf)
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Exhibitions and Interpretation Boards

Title	Type/Location	Produced by
North Harris Trust Eagle Observatory Information Boards.	Wildlife information and identification guide. North Harris Trust Eagle Observatory	The North Harris Trust
Bogha Glas gu Mèabhaig	Hiking map, and local land and deer management information. Bogh Glas car park, North Harris	The North Harris Trust
Ardvourlie Woodland & Walkway	Reforestation project description and walking map. Ardvourlie Woodland.	Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, Western Isle Enterprise & the Millennium Commission
Urgha gu Rèinigeadal	Hiking map, local history and local wildlife information. Urgha.	The North Harris Trust
Trails Around Rèinigeadal	Hiking map, and local natural and cultural history information. Rèinigeadal	Western Isles Tourism Development Programme
Rèinigeadal Hostel Noticeboard	Local natural and culture history information, and local events. Rèinigeadal	The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust
The Harris Millennium Tapestry Exhibition	Co-Chomunn na Hearadh	100 local residents of Harris.
Living on the Edge	Natural heritage and wildlife information. Butt of Ness Lighthouse.	Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The John Muir Trust & CNAG (Gaelic Development Agency).
Assynt Natural and Cultural History Exhibition	Large Natural and Cultural History Exhibition covering wildlife, geology, environmental change and cultural history. Lochinver Tourist Information Centre.	Visit Scotland & North West Highland Geopark.

Online Information

Title	Web Address	Published by
Community Land Scotland Bunchrew Land Declaration	http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/index.php/home/11	Community Land Scotland
Response to SNH Wild Land consultation Dec 2013	As above	Community Land Scotland
Chairman's address to Community Land Scotland Annual Conference 2014	http://83.223.124.6/~communi1/images/uploads/DC_address_Annual_Conf.14_.pdf	Community Land Scotland
Address by Paul Wheelhouse MSP (Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Scot Gov.) to Community Land Scotland Annual Conference 2014	http://83.223.124.6/~communi1/images/uploads/Community_Land_Scotland_Annual_Conference_2014_-_Paul_Wheelhouse_MSP_Address_Land_Reform_.pdf	Community Land Scotland
Community Land Scotland Member Survey	http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/index.php/home/44	Community Land Scotland
Community Land Scotland Economic Indicators Report 2014	Summary available at: http://83.223.124.6/~communi1/images/uploads/FINAL_CLS_Economic_Data_Study_2_Page_Summary_140414_For_Release.pdf (Full report available on request from CLS.)	Amanda Bryan and Steve Westbrook.
Community Land Scotland website	http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/index.php/home/2	Community Land Scotland
The North Harris Trust Website	http://www.north-harris.org/	The North Harris Trust
The North Harris Trust Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/NorthHarrisTrust	The North Harris Trust
Isle of Harris Facebook Group	https://www.facebook.com/groups/isleofharris/?fref=ts	Community operated Facebook Group focusing on Harris
The West Harris Trust Website	http://www.westharristrust.org/	The West Harris Trust
The West Harris Trust Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-West-Harris-Trust/475571879133675?fref=ts	The West Harris Trust
Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust) Website	http://www.galsontrust.com/	Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust) Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/GalsonEstateTrust?fref=ts	Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)
Loch Stiapabhat Local Nature Reserve Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/LochStiapabhatLocalNatureReserve?fref=ts	Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (The Galson Estate Trust)
Culag Community Woodland Trust Website	http://www.culagwoods.org.uk/	Culag Community Woodland Trust
Culag Community Woodland Trust Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/culagcommunitywoodlandtrust?fref=ts	Culag Community Woodland Trust
Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Website	http://coigach-assynt.org/	Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape
Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Coigach-Assynt-Living-Landscape/1413489162204212?fref=ts	Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape

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