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Landscapes of connection

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Cover Page Footnote

This piece provides the authors' insights into the diverse narratives shared by researchers at the Landscape Narratives session of the Institute of Australian Geographers 2019 conference. The meeting was hosted upon the lands of the Palawa and Pakana peoples in Hobart, Tasmania. The authors thank those who contributed to the session: Alison Williams, McMaster University; Tod Jones, Curtin University; Emma Sheppard-Simms, University of Tasmania; Helena Shojaei, University of the South Pacific; Alexander Cullen, University of Cambridge; Malcolm Johnson, Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality USA; Cara Stitzlein, CSIRO; Scott McKinnon, University of Wollongong; Aysha Fleming, CSIRO.

Landscapes of connection¹

Eloise Biggs (University of Western Australia), Jennifer Bond (Charles Sturt University)

Identity. Emotion. Imagination.

Defining character. Shaping personality.

Iceland, an island of wilderness intersecting with lives of rurality and agrarianism. Multiple palettes of place provide therapeutic landscapes immortalised within literary histories. Glaciers, lagoons and oceans surround farmsteads – dwellings of traditional sociality, with strong bonds tying family, religion and health. Personalities of the living are treated with utmost respect and a certain sense of spirituality extends to inanimate objects and mystical beings. Landscapes deliver therapy to the wellbeing of inhabitants; wildlands of importance and ubiquitous excitement provide emotional normality and scope for meaningful reflection and healing.

... Landscapes of therapy.

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Relations are essential to understanding the nature of place. In Indonesia, digital connections are facilitating landscape connectivity for heritage movements, whereby a changing political climate has advocated increased value to history and memory within the landscape. The Bol Brutu, a diverse group of archaeology devotees, engage in strategic action via extensive social media networks for active cultural protection. They peacefully seek inspiration from poetry, film, paintings and photography, from rare sites across the island province of Java, curating a nouveau cosmopolitan engagement with heritage. Sharing cuisine, celebrating culture.

... Landscapes of sociality.

Burial islands portray traumatic landscape narratives. Often spaces of past colonial governmentality, products of troubled repression which evoke ghostly reminders of history gone. Convict or Aboriginal prisons and burial grounds, Indigenous internment camps, leprosariums, asylums, quarantine stations, reformatories. Places which signify a geography of exclusion, where social death precedes physical death. How do we sensitively memorialise these landscapes, to prevent a loss of history at the expense of commercial gain and empty reductions of commemoration to technocratic representation; memory reduced to a map symbol?

... Landscapes of memory.

A shift to participatory action research is improving the sustainability and efficiency of development interventions to engage and empower local actors, particularly those more marginalised, for co-production of knowledge.

Inhabitants of the Kingdom of Tonga are eager to participate and be heard by landscape researchers, yet it is notable that a history of adverse power-dynamics and engagement apathy have potential to mar contributions. Cultural awareness and cognitive bias are important for researchers to acknowledge, ensuring that grassroots participation can be successfully fostered and reflects a lasting connectivity to land.

... Landscape of participation.

Sites of ontological frictions are emerging in Timor-Leste in response to climatic challenges. The landscape provides a place for managing, identity and knowledge, yet who is responsible for emergent climate impacts and associated socio-cultural costs? When central governing scientific knowledge is weak, climate change assumes political power, often viewed too simplistically, such as 'bad weather caused by tree cutting'. Careful consideration of complex customary epistemologies and the relations to the land-weather-scape is necessary to avoid language miscommunications and localised environmental conflict.

... Landscapes of custom.

The Talakhaya watershed nestles the southside of Rota, an island of the Mariana archipelago. A clandestine catchment with a degenerating economy; narratives of land leaving alongside emigration. Landscape management practices heighten threats from native land clearance, invasive species, over-harvesting, storms, drought and burning. Elders note disconnect of today's youth to knowledge of the water-stressed jungle ecosystem, a cultural shift,

a disconnection to landscape. Environmental policy needs enforcement to improve protection. Successful landscape restoration comes through support and cooperation.

... Landscapes of threat.

Conversation is a necessary tool for promoting a low carbon future in Australia. Understanding landscape user needs is essential for adopting carbon farming. Participatory research provides a mechanism to translate and reframe practice for the emergence of viable long-term sustainable solutions. Open dialogue is critical. Capturing the personas of stakeholders improves understanding of attitudes and motivations, identifies capacity for change, and is integral for realising innovation. Landscape managers can benefit from digital tools and integrated decision support to successfully assist land management.

... Landscapes of personality.

Bushfire, a pervasive threat in Australia; vital for ecological rejuvenation, destructive for property, devastating for life. Fire trauma eventuates a loss of belongings. Navigating ruinous landscapes evokes an inevitable sense of loss, sadness, nothingness. Lost objects carry heart-breaking materialised memories; reminiscences of what has past, reminders from the past yet to come. Pragmatic reflections suggest only life is irreplaceable. Assets which survive become treasured items, conjuring a future of untold stories. Lost belongings unite dwellers, strong familial connections emerge, and charred communities are fortified through what remains.

... Landscapes of belonging.

Now is the time to reflect. Connect.

Time to nurture the significance and worth of land.