

Protected Agricultural Landscapes in Wales:  
exploring the potential of delivering sustainable heritage  
management through local partnerships  
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**Introduction** - Wales' cultural landscapes are commonly packaged as international heritage or recreational tourist destinations. They are clearly the scenic outcomes of centuries of traditional primary industries of extensive family farming and historically quarrying.

Just under 25% of Wales' rural land area is protected by UN Category V designation as internationally culturally or ecologically significant (Lane et al 2015). Designated under UK legislation as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty they are branded as 'the Nation's breathing spaces' but are also primarily indigenous living spaces where most land is privately farmed

But within these landscapes, traditionally understood to be heavily dependent on the influence of agriculture to deliver both livelihood and ecosystem services, recent initiatives of co-management through partnerships are being strategically established driven by both centralised governance and funding imperatives. Early forms of land management partnerships such as agri-environmental agreements and specific site management partnerships have evolved into complex multi sector entities. These are fast becoming underpinning platforms

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upon which management structures and relationships are enacted which may involve community, conservation and commercial interests. New funding opportunities are enabled which (in some part) substitute contracting public sector funding outcomes of austerity measures by central government. Thus the changing nature and organisation of these partnerships offer a form of protected areas governance that “*have been under researched*” (Wilson et al, 2009) and therefore exciting opportunities for exploring how and whether spaces designated as highly valuable recreational landscapes may be sustainably managed by multistakeholder partnerships. Such partnerships determine a wide range of outcomes for public, private and community based benefits and thus transparency and accountability in their operation is clearly a fundamental requirement to steer these protected agri-heritage landscapes away from unsustainable commercialisation as partnerships are ‘*complex settings often require negotiation among multiple voices expressing goals that are partly shared and partly conflicting*’ (MacCool, 2009, p. 310).

**Methods** - This research presents initial results from ongoing critical exploration of local partnership as a means of enabling both cultural and natural heritage conservation and biodiversity. These partnerships also proposedly build capacities in communities within National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Empirical evidence from several Welsh case studies linked to the governance of nationally significant, heritage-laden sites and treasured spaces, is presented for discussion namely Snowdonia National Park’s most recent partnership the Carneddau Landscape Partnership, secondly the Tirlun Llyn Partnership established its community consultation activities in 2008 and a brief overview of the agri-landscape of the AONB Clwydian Hills and Dee Valley which is currently being considered for designation as Wales’ fourth National Park.

**Findings** - Protected spaces and sites across the UK are facing both conservation and development challenges originating from 'without and within' their boundaries. There are increased demands from commercial interests for access and recreational experiences and also great uncertainty within policy and funding futures for indigenous farming with land use priorities drifting from food production to increased afforestation and climate and water management. Recent strategic governance for protected areas management in Wales (Welsh Government 2017), has led to an increased efforts and dependence on local and wider partnerships to plan, manage and deliver environmental and tourism services. Across the partnerships described the organisation and priorities and also challenges are wide-ranging which indicates that such key partnerships require more not less resourcing to ensure strong protection for such unique and attractive agri-landscapes. They also would benefit from maintaining clear local government communication and from reporting to agreed ambitious targets for community wellbeing, sustainable economic development along with reinforcing the clear biodiversity and environmental quality already monitored by Natural Resources Wales. Initial findings from this study examine these issues within the unique legislative context for sustainable development that exists in Wales in Welsh Government's commitments to seven Future Wellbeing Goals.

**Conclusions** - Despite devolved governance, reduced public sector funding, has impacted on staffing and strategic protection of Welsh cultural landscapes and heritage sites that hold very strong meanings for local communities. Such developments offer opportunities for protecting and responsibly interpreting both natural and built heritage associated with Welsh agriculture and Welsh cultural identity. The success of a partnership approach to co-managing these valuable agri-

landscapes depends on inclusive and transparent decision making, on appropriate formal planning and guidance, cross sector monitoring and as a key aspect on fair funding rather than a dependence on random financial awards and patchwork efforts using up capacity to seek competitive lottery type funding. Not to fund the sustainable management of these landscapes would very soon lead to their degradation through overtourism and recreational impacts and thus to taint the essence of the mountains on the soul for both residents and visitors.

*' Ymwasgai henffurf y mynyddoedd hyn,  
Nes mynd o'u moelni i mewn i'm hanfod i.'*\*

(The ancient form of these mountains presses

Their bareness into my very essence – \* trans *Moelni* by T.H. Parry William, poem circ. 1930)

## References

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