

The Centre for Mountain Studies: Contributing to Sustainable Development in the Mountains and Beyond

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The Centre for Mountain Studies: Contributing to Sustainable Development in the Mountains and Beyond



The Centre for Mountain Studies (CMS) is located at Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland, and it hosts the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development. CMS staff and students have been active in research and knowledge-exchange activities at scales from Scotland to the world. Particular emphases of current work are on biosphere reserves, land ownership, and community development. The part-time online MSc in sustainable mountain development has attracted students from 4 continents.

International activities

The UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development was renewed in 2018 for the second time, until 2021. Recent global activities have included the publication of a report on mountain ecosystem services and climate change (Egan and Price 2017) and a paper on 2 decades of experience of mapping mountain areas (Price et al 2018). Martin Price, CMS director, also continues his activities on biosphere reserves (BRs), as the UK representative to the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme and a member of its Working Group on Technical Guidelines for BRs, and as colead of the Thematic Group on BRs of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Ecosystem Management—particularly

relevant for mountain areas, where two thirds of the world's BRs are located.

BRs are also the focus of a major 3 year project led by the CMS, "Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism," funded by the European Commission's Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme. The project involves BRs in Canada, Finland, Norway, and Scotland and also a regional park in Iceland and a World Heritage Site in Greenland (Figure 1). Its main concept is that, effectively implemented, ecotourism can preserve rather than destroy the natural and cultural heritage of these "sustainable heritage areas" (SHAs) while increasing visitors' understanding, providing jobs, and strengthening community cohesion. A year into the project, the CMS staff have produced reports on mapping assets and governance for SHAs (Ferguson 2017, 2018) and guided and supported the project partners in each SHA in organizing meetings with stakeholders to map natural and cultural heritage assets and identify possible ecotourism initiatives for further development. Later in the project, these will be shared through "learning journeys," and an online resource will be developed.

CMS staff are also active in the Horizon 2020 project "Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas" (2016–2020), which aims to advance understanding of the reconfiguration of social practices, in agriculture, forestry, and rural development, that seek to enhance outcomes on societal wellbeing in marginalized rural areas (mountain areas, islands, arid areas). The CMS has been primarily involved with defining and categorizing

marginalized rural areas (Price et al 2017) and developing an online database of social innovations in rural areas in Europe and around the Mediterranean (Bryce et al 2017).

Scottish activities

Since 2007, staff at CMS have conducted a range of research projects related to land reform and land ownership in Scotland (Glass et al 2013). In Scotland, there are no restrictions on how much land a single individual can own, and a concentrated pattern of large-scale private land ownership exists, particularly in rural areas. The Scottish Government has a vision for a fairer—or wider and more equitable—distribution of land, with more diverse land ownership, and communities and individuals will have greater access to land. In late 2017, the Scottish Land Commission (SLC) commissioned CMS to review international experience of interventions to manage land markets and impose limits on the ownership of land. The research identified and described restrictions on land ownership in 22 countries (Glass et al 2018), via desk-based review and triangulation of information with country experts. In 18 of the countries, there is some form of approval process in relation to who can own land; it would therefore not be unusual to develop an approval framework in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has also set an ambitious target to bring 1,000,000 acres (405,000 ha) of land (~5% of the country's land area) into community ownership by 2020, with community rights to buy land existing under the Land Reform (Scotland) Acts of 2003 and 2016 and the



FIGURE 1 Igalliku/Garðar, Greenland, including part of the Kujataa Cultural World Heritage Site. (Photo by Garðar Guðmundsson. Copyright owner: Fornleifastofnun Íslands)



Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act of 2015. The CMS, Scotland's Rural College, and others undertook a study for the SLC, to review the effectiveness of community ownership mechanisms (Mc Morran et al 2018). Interviews and workshops were held with nearly 100 community groups, stakeholder organizations, professionals involved in community purchases, and land owners who had attempted (successfully or not) to transfer land to communities, via both legislative and nonlegislative (negotiated) routes. The research has deepened understanding of the key strengths and challenges experienced during community land and asset acquisition processes and led to recommendations for government

and other public and private bodies to implement.

Interactions between landscapes and local communities continue to be a topic for policy-relevant research. The examination of socioeconomic benefits and impacts is a recurring theme; current work includes the development of socioeconomic measures for the Woodland Trust, which recently purchased a 1000 ha forest on the shore of Loch Arkaig in the Scottish Highlands. The research aims to enable the trust to track the impact of the forest's restoration on socioeconomic change over the next 20 years, in addition to ecological measures more commonly associated with such initiatives. The measures are being developed with input from the local community and its forest group. CMS is also contributing to a

review of the socioeconomic impacts of driven grouse moor management, commissioned by the Scottish Government. In addition, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are supporting 2 PhD studentships. One explores the potential for refurbishing historic hydropower-generation facilities for the benefit of local communities in the Scottish Highlands and islands. The other considers the socioeconomic and environmental changes along a major highway in Cairngorms National Park that will result from an expected growth in the tourism economy when the road's capacity is doubled by 2025. Another PhD project explores the role of volunteering in wildlife conservation management.

CMS staff continue to participate in policy-relevant government committees and working groups, including an independent Deer Working Group set up by Scottish Government to recommend changes to ensure effective deer management in Scotland; the Scottish Natural Heritage Scientific Advisory Committee; and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Protected Areas Working Group.

Looking forward

In the past, a major focus of the activities of the CMS has been knowledge exchange, particularly the 3 international conferences in 2005, 2010, and 2015 (Price 2011; Glass et al 2013; Price et al 2016; Woolvin et al 2016). Unfortunately, the funding stream that enabled these conferences to take place no longer exists. However, the series of “Perth conferences” will continue in 2019 with the International Mountain Conference, which will take place in Innsbruck, Austria, in September 2019 (see <https://www.uibk.ac.at/congress/imc2019/index.html.en>); the UNESCO Chair is one of the partners. In addition, the online MSc in sustainable mountain development, now in its 15th year, continues to attract students from

around the world; the first students from Africa and Asia have started this year (2018). The CMS remains committed to undertaking high-quality research and informing debates on mountain-related issues, both nationally and internationally.

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