

The Centre for Mountain Studies: Active From Scottish to Global Scales

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The Centre for Mountain Studies: Active From Scottish to Global Scales

University of the
Highlands and Islands
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Mountain Studies

The Centre for Mountain Studies (CMS), located at Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland, hosts the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development. Since 2000, CMS staff and students have been active in research and knowledge exchange activities at scales from the local—in Scotland—to the global (Price 2011; Glass et al 2013). In addition to hosting the Mountains of our Future Earth conference (Perth III), recent international activities have focused on climate change, biosphere reserves, social innovation, and stakeholder engagement in biodiversity research. Projects in Scotland have mainly addressed land management and local communities. The CMS also runs a part-time online MSc program in Sustainable Mountain Development.

International activities

The main recent global activity was to host the international conference Mountains of our Future Earth, as described in the editorial of this issue (Price et al 2016) and the synthesis paper derived from the conference (Gleeson et al 2016). Martin Price, director of the Centre for Mountain Studies (CMS), has also contributed to global policy processes. As rapporteur of the International Coordinating Council of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) Man and the Biosphere Programme, he led the development of a 10-year action plan (UNESCO 2016), which is of particular relevance for mountain areas, as two thirds of the world's biosphere reserves are located in them. He also worked with UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme to produce a report on mountain ecosystem services and climate change, launched at the 20th

Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Egan and Price 2016).

Within Europe, rural development has been—and continues to be—a key policy issue, with particular challenges in mountain areas (Price 2016). Social innovations, through which new institutions and governance arrangements can enhance development outcomes, can provide solutions to such challenges. Recognizing that much remains to be done to link social innovations with the desired policy outcomes, the European Union's Horizon 2020 program is funding a 26-partner consortium to investigate social innovation in marginalized rural areas of Europe and North Africa, with a focus on agriculture, forestry, and rural development. The project (www.simra-h2020.eu/) began in May 2016; the CMS is primarily involved with defining and categorizing marginalized rural areas and developing an online database of social innovations.

CMS staff is also active in exploring approaches to stakeholder engagement and collaboration for environmental management. In 2014, they analyzed the stakeholder approaches of 10 international biodiversity research projects, in order to produce a stakeholder engagement toolkit for European researchers (see www.biodiversa.org/). This includes method guides on how to involve stakeholders in different aspects of biodiversity research, including stakeholder identification, codesign of projects, scenario analysis, and participatory and citizen science.

Scottish activities

Scotland's uplands have a unique pattern of land ownership, with large

areas owned by a small number of private individuals and businesses, as well as public and nongovernmental organizations. To examine the implications of these ownership patterns for local communities, The Scottish Government commissioned a study, led by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and involving CMS staff, to help inform Scotland's land reform policy. Three pairs of parishes, with 1 dominated by 1 or more large landowners and 1 that had experienced fragmentation of ownership, were analyzed, using secondary quantitative data, focus groups, and interviews with landowners and community and business representatives. The study concluded that a myriad of factors influence the economic, social, and environmental conditions in rural communities; the complexity is too great to conclude that patterns of land ownership are a significant factor (Thomson et al 2016).

On large private estates, hunting for game (red grouse and deer) has been widespread since the 19th century. Recent research investigated the community perceptions and socioeconomic impacts of moorland management and red grouse shooting in 2 case study areas (McMorran et al 2015). The community benefits of grouse shooting were strongly recognized in the Angus Glens, whereas views were more divided in the Monadhliath mountains. Support for grouse shooting and moorland management was often linked to the perceived wider socioeconomic and community benefits, such as job creation and increased income for rural people. A further study on wild deer management, commissioned by the Scottish Government and in collaboration with SRUC, is currently being completed. This has included collaborative workshops with deer

FIGURE 1 Blair Castle on the Atholl Estate, with Carn Liath (973 m) and other mountains of the Southern Cairngorms behind. This is the largest area of privately owned land in Perthshire (59,000 ha), used for a wide range of activities including deer hunting, forestry, sheep grazing, and tourism. Much of the estate, within Cairngorms National Park, has been designated as “wild land.” The photograph is taken from the A9 road, which is being widened. (Photo by Martin Price)



managers, land managers, policy makers, and researchers to identify key gaps in research and evidence in order to inform sustainable deer management.

The interactions between landscapes and local communities are a further topic for policy-relevant research. One theme is wild land: areas that contain “seminatural” habitats and show “minimal signs of human influence.” CMS researchers contributed to a project commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage that examined the benefits and constraints associated with wild land for landowners, land managers, local communities, and the general public. Following a literature review, 10 case study areas were analyzed. Interviews were conducted with key community stakeholders and land managers to identify the key benefits and constraints of wild land. The interviewees then completed an online geographic information system mapping exercise to identify areas important for ecosystem services. On a contrasting theme, CMS researchers are addressing the

implications of the current 10-year project to construct a dual carriageway along the A9 trunk road, the main highway to the Highlands (Figure 1). A scoping study explored community perceptions of landscapes and cultural heritage along the route. This identified a wide range of values for the landscapes, and found that the history of the route was intertwined with the lived history and cultural heritage of these landscapes and local communities. A PhD studentship supported by Transport Scotland will build on this scoping study, further exploring the interactions and relationships between people, landscapes, and heritage along this major transport corridor.

Looking forward

In addition to its research and knowledge exchange activities such as conferences and workshops, the CMS delivers an online MSc in sustainable mountain development. This continues to see an increase in applications from across the globe and receives positive feedback from

its graduates. The CMS is committed to continuing its reputation for high-quality research and informing debates on mountain-related issues, both nationally and internationally.

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