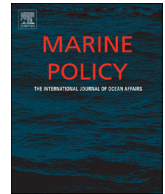


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## “Coastal landscapes for whom? Adaptation challenges and landscape management in Cornwall”

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## ABSTRACT

Many coastal landscapes across Europe are undergoing change due to the impacts of a changing climate. In the context of coastal erosion, especially the question of physical access to the landscape for a variety of publics is becoming ever more important. Where a multitude of actors are involved in landscape management, diverging subjective and collective perceptions of these changing landscapes, hold potential for disagreement about suitable adaptive measures. Although the body of literature on the role of subjective values in processes of climate adaptation is growing the societal constructions of respective places and landscapes underlying different adaptation approaches remain under-researched. We show in this paper that how landscapes are understood by actors in environmental management matters for decision-making. In particular, different understandings of the Cornish landscape at Godrevy Headland are shown to have material implications for how issues of access, visitor management and long-term responses to climate change and coastal erosion are addressed. In the case of Godrevy, coastal erosion has required local actors to plan the relocation of a visitor car park, bringing contrasting perspectives on the landscape, its use and protection to the fore. Uncovering the individual and collective assumptions about the landscape behind these conflicting narratives, is vital for fostering inclusive policy- and planning processes around climate change adaptation.

### 1. Introduction

Many coastal landscapes are changing due to the impacts of climate change: coastal erosion, increased wave action and extreme weather events change the physical-material fabric of coastal stretches of land [1–3]. Studying coastal management practices in the UK, Geoghegan and Leyshon [4] find that as the changing climate alters many coastlines, what becomes necessary is also “a changing philosophy and range of management techniques”. Fischer and Reise [5] have similarly argued that coping with and responding to climate change at the coast constitutes a cultural challenge, requiring shifts in ‘coastal mentalities’, which in some cases, have emerged in association with specific material practices of land management and coastal protection over long periods of time. Where coastal erosion is accelerated by climate change, an issue likely to become more significant in the future is that of access to coastal landscapes for a variety of publics. In many cases landscapes are not managed by a single actor, but by a variety of organizations, governmental bodies and private land owners with often diverging interests [6]. It is recognized within and beyond human geography that collective and individual values shape processes of climate adaptation

at the local level [7–9]. Recent studies have placed increased attention on the need to include lay knowledges and socio-cultural values in processes of coastal management, particularly concerning the development of long-term strategies for climate adaptation [10–12]. It is recognized, however, that the inclusion of multiple yet inconsistent knowledge systems within coastal management processes creates significant challenges of integration, translation and negotiation across differing epistemologies [10,13]. In an effort to move beyond established dichotomies between expert and lay knowledges, environmental management may usefully be viewed in terms of situated practices, informed by, often place-specific, nature-culture imaginaries [14,15]. Practices of coastal management and nature conservation are situated in the landscape, both materially and culturally [16,17]. The interrelationships between lay and expert or professional perspective have, however, received limited critical attention to date.

This study sought to progress this line of research through an examination of the landscape constructions and narratives underlying how local professional actors and stakeholders perceive and understand a specific coastal landscape [also 18]. It is furthermore evident that the current UK government policy of allowing coastal erosion to proceed

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along much of the UK's coast in the future will have substantial material implications for the maintenance and future sustainability of coastal infrastructure and the integrity of cultural heritage sites at the coast. It also represents a direct challenge to the credo of the National Trust to protect key landscapes 'forever, for everyone' as detailed below [19,20].

The paper argues that the adaptive management of both coastal and climate change requires engagement with the multiple and at times divergent conceptualisations of place and landscape by different local stakeholders. In coastal areas managed as common goods and with high numbers of visitors, one facet of such conceptualisations is the question of who should (and who should not) have access to the landscape [21]. The paper starts by setting out a theoretical background of social-constructivist landscape research, the relevance of understanding landscape as a commons and, in close connection to this, the question of access to the landscape. Subsequently, the case study area of Godrevy in Cornwall (UK) is introduced, a coastal headland managed by a variety of actors with competing interests. After the analysis of these actors' distinct perspectives on the local landscape, a discussion follows on how these perspectives inform and complicate local adaptation activities in response to coastal erosion in practice. We explore the specific material implications of different perspectives on a changing coastal landscape within the context of a specific management issue, the relocation of a car park due to coastal erosion.

## 2. Landscape narratives and questions of access

To understand the different viewpoints of the local actors in the Godrevy case and the disagreement between them, this paper draws on existing literature on the societal construction of landscapes as well as landscapes as common goods. Investigating the question of who should have access to the landscape and in which form, different perspectives on landscape and climate change are taken into account to unravel how societal processes of adaptation to coastal erosion are embedded in local contexts and grounded in different social constructions of the affected physical spaces.

### 2.1. A social-constructivist perspective on landscapes

From a positivist viewpoint, "[l]andscape is [...] defined as a delimited section of the Earth's surface reflecting the sum of its component parts" [22]. Consequently, it is understood as a set of objects and characteristics existing independently from the observer [23,24]. Most positivist theories, thus, neglect the importance of socio-cultural values and meanings associated with different elements of landscapes, and therefore inadequately take into consideration their societal construction [25]. Addressing this shortcoming, social constructivist perspectives on landscape have developed over the past two decades where landscape is conceptualised in terms of "lived and subjectively perceived constructs rather than focusing on the quantifiable, 'objective' characteristics of spaces" [3,18,23,26]. Landscapes are thereby understood not as fixed physical entities, but as individual and collective mental constructs pertaining to external physical spaces. What is viewed as a landscape and what is not is therefore the result of negotiation processes within society. How any landscape is perceived by stakeholders and framed in policy processes is changeable, dynamic, and closely connected to prevailing societal values [21]. Central questions of social-constructivist landscape research in the context of this paper are: What do the different stakeholders at Godrevy mean when they use the term 'landscape'? What are the implications of different and contrasting interpretations of landscape at the same location? What understandings of environment-society relations and climate change underlie these perspectives [24,27]?

Greider and Garkovich [14,25] stress that most physical spaces that are used for one purpose are also used for another. More significantly, any landscape that is societally constructed "has multiple meanings",

and variances between such meanings can lead to conflict and contestation among different groups within a society; especially when this space is undergoing change [24,25,28]. If landscapes are faced with change, a process of (re-)negotiation sets in within and between the different societal groups involved in their management. In the context of climate change, Köpsel et al. [21], found from interviews with actors in landscape management in Cornwall (UK) that uncovering diverging narratives of landscape and landscape management brings valuable insights into different actors' interpretations of landscape change and resulting approaches to climate change adaptation. Narratives in this context are understood as stories and storylines that people use to make sense of certain events or phenomena such as landscape or climate change [21,29]. Despite the value of a social-constructivist perspective on landscapes, however, "relatively little attempt has been made to think through the potential for this approach in understanding the socio-political relations of climate change" and the concrete physical implications for adaptive measures on the ground [20: 239]. Addressing this research gap, this paper first investigates how local actors make sense of a changing climate through the landscapes which they manage, and in a second step, identifies the implications of such landscape constructions for local adaptation activities. Before expanding on the research design and methodology of the Godrevy case study, however, two theoretical debates related to the phenomenon of landscape require closer attention: the idea of landscapes as commons and the question of who should have access to them.

### 2.2. Landscape as commons and questions of access

The Council of Europe [3,30] understands a landscape as "an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". This definition builds on an implicit assumption that certain landscapes are common goods of value to society at large [6]. Commons are defined by Ostrom [31] as goods that are not privately owned, but that are accessible to all groups of society. Gailing [18,32] finds in this context that when drawing "attention to the immaterial aspects of landscape, then [...] landscape is a common". This interpretation of landscapes implies that to be a common good, a landscape does not need to be physically accessible to the public. This is especially relevant where a specific landscape is visible from accessible vantage points as is the case with many seascapes and mountain landscapes, and which is also partially applicable in the case of Godrevy headland. A landscape perceived to be of regional, national or global significance (e.g. World Heritage Sites) may also constitute a commons irrespective of local property relations [33]. The question of for whom the landscape should be physically accessible represents a key issue of contention in the Godrevy case study. In practice, issues of visual and physical accessibility are often intertwined.

At this point it is important to more precisely tease out the implications of an understanding of landscape as commons. Individual landscapes generally reflect a complex interrelationship of property rights, legal codes and community norms in the governance of the land. In this way, the boundaries between public and private become blurred. Legal scholar Mitchell [34: 353] stresses the need to move beyond established mutually exclusive categories of 'public' and 'private' with regard to rural spaces. He notes that private ownership does not necessarily imply exclusive control and should be placed in the context of a 'web of relations' including multiple public claims [34]. This web of relations becomes particularly complex where multiple sectoral interests, such as nature protection, tourism, agriculture, and spatial planning, are involved in the management of the landscape [23]. In cases of conflicting objectives between such actors, the management goals of one local actor cannot be carried out without impairing another's [35]. In Section 4.2 below, the specific implications of this are outlined for the Godrevy case study.

Despite increased attention to the spatiality of the commons,

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