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Creative approaches to landscape research: Using multisensory and multispecies research perspectives with marginalised groups

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ABSTRACT

The research project discussed here used artist-led workshops to enable people from marginalised groups to explore and communicate their relationships with nature and landscapes. Aligning with multisensory and multispecies methodologies, five workshops took place in England's north-west, in which participants from marginalised and excluded communities co-produced creative works representing their sensorial responses to those environments. Drawing on participants' experiences of these workshops, and the resulting creative works, the affordances of location-specific creative activities as a means of facilitating connection with local landscapes are examined, as are the opportunities that creative methodologies offer in enabling marginalised and disadvantaged groups to engage in debates about nature and landscape use. Participants benefitted greatly from the project, which enabled small steps towards involving marginalised groups in debates about nature and landscape use. However, challenges remain for decision-making and a more equal distribution of power amongst humans and other species whose interests may be overlooked.

KEYWORDS

Landscape; multispecies; multisensory; creative research; arts-based research

Introduction and context

Access to landscapes in the UK, and therefore contribution to decision-making about those landscapes, is unequal. People living in poorer parts of England and Wales have less public space available to them, and have to travel further to access it, than people living in richer areas (Chapman, Prabhu, & Scott, 2022, p. 2). This disparity is even more acute within contexts of ethnicity, whereby residents of predominantly white communities have significantly more access to natural spaces than those in predominantly ethnic minority communities (p. 25). People with disabilities typically access natural spaces less than those without disabilities, often because of a lack of infrastructure and additional financial costs (Natural England, 2022, pp. 6–8). Regional differences within the UK are apparent too, with areas in the North West of England such as Liverpool, Blackpool, and Sefton offering residents the least access to natural spaces (Chapman et al., 2022, p. 23). This UK context is similar to that in other countries, and

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there is a global pattern of inequalities in access to natural spaces (Chen et al., 2022; Sun, Saha, Tost, Kong, & Xu, 2022).

Yet research has shown the benefits to people accessing natural spaces in terms of physical and mental health and well-being (Li, Menotti, Ding, & Wells, 2021). Accessing nature is especially beneficial for those who have health problems, disabilities, or live in stress-inducing circumstances such as over-crowded or insecure housing (Berto, 2014; Hartig, Mitchell, de Vries, & Frumkin, 2014). And yet it is these groups of people who are least likely to be able to visit natural environments because of a lack of transport, no-one to accompany them, unfamiliarity with nature, or an unawareness of places' existence (Wall-Reinius, Godtman Kling, & Ioannides, 2022). These inequalities are important, because exclusion from such spaces inevitably results in exclusion from shaping or conserving those spaces through debates and decisions about those landscapes.

This exclusion aligns with concerns about what is categorised as relevant knowledge in processes that lead to landscape decision-making. Given policy-making relies on evidence-based approaches (Sutherland et al., 2010, p. 956), it matters what kinds of information get counted as evidence, and the kinds of people who contribute to that evidence. Certain communities' exclusion from natural landscapes means not only are their voices not heard in such debates, but that resulting evidence-based policies are likely to further entrench inequality. Where evaluations of nature have in the past largely been either instrumental (measuring value through use) or intrinsic (value is embedded in existence), there has been a movement towards acknowledging relational values, in which concepts such as 'love, care and meaningfulness' (Neuteleers, 2020, p. 468) inform humans' engagements with the natural world. This necessitates 'more innovative and collaborative approaches to landscape management' (Roe & Mell, 2013, p. 669), especially in terms of finding ways to more broadly involve those hitherto excluded.

There is a growing volume of scholarship evidencing that creative arts- and humanities-based approaches offer routes that enable such engagement (Cinderby, de Bruin, Cambridge, Muhoza, & Ngabirano, 2021; Franklin, 2022). Concerned over the ways in which particular groups are marginalised in terms of access to nature and therefore decision-making about the environment, the authors here undertook in 2020–22 a project which used creative artist-led workshops to enable people from marginalised groups (young people with autism, deaf children, disabled adults, referrals from healthcare professionals, long-term unemployed and college students) to explore and communicate their relationships with landscapes. With a focus on multispecies and multisensory approaches, the aims of the project were:

- To explore ways of examining engagements with landscape that are inclusive, drawing on notions of multispecies and the multisensory to achieve this.
- To facilitate the co-production of innovative artworks to convey community meanings of landscape through multiple perspectives and senses.
- To communicate with decision-makers, particularly in local government, about landscape through the experiences of marginalised groups, represented through multisensory art.
- To foster longer-term working relationships that can continue to inform decision-making processes and outcomes related to landscape and land-use.

This paper focuses on how we addressed the first two of these aims, and explores the challenges of meeting the third and fourth.

The unusual pairing of 'multispecies' and 'multisensory' approaches sets up a unique framework, and these terms require explanation. An established term in ecology, 'multispecies' is used here to characterise critical perspectives that are connected in their commitment to non-anthropocentric ways of thinking. Multispecies studies consider communities of living beings, their shared histories and interrelationships in ways that open up conceptualisations of knowledge and evidence (van Dooren, Kirksey, & Münster, 2016). They use methods that decentre

humanism, address questions of nonhuman agency, challenge nature/culture and nonhuman/human binaries and examine human entanglements with other living forms such as plants, animals, fungi and bacteria (Hartigan, 2021; Hathaway, 2018; Miller, 2019). These approaches radically rethink human relationships with nature and the environment, necessitating forms of 'multispecies justice' (Celermajer et al., 2021) that can inform policy and decision-making.

Further, the emphasis on a 'multisensory' approach aims to unsettle forms of anthropocentric ocularcentrism (Davies, 2012; Levent, Pascual-Leone, & Lacey, 2014), and instead draws upon 'our seven senses of sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch, vestibular and proprioception [which] creates a richer sensorial experience' (Wonowidjoyo, 2022, p. 3). While there may appear to be tension between multisensory experiences (which have to be human-centred) and multispecies perspectives (which can only be imagined by humans), our aim was to disrupt anthropocentric ways of understanding landscape. The novel combination of multispecies and multisensory perspectives was a means of building 'creative relationships with nonhuman beings' (Andrejev, 2021, p. 4), in ways accessible to societal groups which are consistently excluded in land-use decision-making (Little, Lyon, & Tsouvalis, 2023, pp. 67–69). Without simplistically flattening situated and particular forms of oppression, the project saw an affinity between forms of oppression that marginalise certain human communities, and anthropocentric thinking that similarly prioritises the human over the non-human (Andrejev, 2021, p. 6).

Methodology: inclusion, participation and art

The project incorporated participatory arts-based approaches (Nunn, 2022; Seppälä, Sarantou, & Miettinen, 2021), with the artists as practitioners raising questions, problems and challenges (Gray, 1996, p.3) in collaboration with participants. Alongside the artists' practice, an ethnographic participant observation approach was used as a way of observing and documenting the process. Although placing researchers alongside the participants and undertaking the same activities might be perceived as a non-intrusive method, participant observation is potentially 'a profoundly political act' which 'can enable us to challenge hegemonic conceptions of the world, challenge authority, and better act in the world' (Shah, 2017, p. 56). This is because seeing things from others' perspectives by (ideally) 'living' with and among them forces a new way of seeing socio-political structures. Given the very precise focus of our investigation, we recognise that our research was a kind of 'micro-ethnography' that did not go beyond the boundaries of the workshops, although participants frequently referred to their everyday living situations and past experiences. Participant observation meant that the research priorities were given over to others - the artists and the participants, forcing a relinquishing of power over epistemological and ontological assumptions. In its focus on specific, situated locations and contexts, this project is aligned with other site-based research projects such as those in the UK's Lake District (Kussmaul, 2022), Mainz in Germany (Armbrüster & Witte, 2022) and Kitchener in Canada (MacDonald & Wiens, 2019).

Participants and methods

The research team worked in partnership with a range of existing community- and education-based groups which already met regularly. All partners were approached at the stage of designing and formulating the project. They were selected because they represented groups of people marginalised by existing societal structures, with facilitation from practitioners who were experts in community engagement and/or specific conditions, including autism, learning disabilities or being deaf. The college students who visited the woodland all lived in a town with multiple indices of deprivation and most had diagnoses of autism; the GP referrals on the community farm included people in recovery from drug addiction; the group of disabled adults included two individuals who used

wheelchairs, and people with learning differences, anxiety and depression; several of the deaf children had additional conditions; the group for young autistic people catered for those who found everyday life problematic. The group leaders were proactive in identifying individuals to take part in the project, ensuring informed and ongoing consent, and accompanied them at workshops to provide bespoke support as required. In total, five groups of 6–10 people were involved, and each group was allocated an artist experienced in community art. A local area representing a 'natural environment' (woodland, nature reserve, community farm, or allotment) was identified by agreement with the researchers, artists and groups, where workshops were held. Even though these areas were close to where they lived, most participants had never visited them (see Table 1 for details). The need for bespoke transport for each group highlighted the difficulties in accessing such spaces in normal circumstances, and hence the novelty of the experience of being there.

Table 1. Participant groups, locations, and artwork produced.

Group	Workshop location	Artworks facilitated by one artist in each of the five settings
A: Disabled adults	Gorse Hill Nature Reserve, Aughton, Lancashire, UK	Multisensory film about trees housed in an exhibition box (Figure 1)
B: Deaf children aged 10-11	WWT Martin Mere Wetland Centre, Burscough, Lancashire, UK	Stories, poems and a set of 9 'bird language' pictures (Figure 2)
C: Autistic young people aged 13-23	Isle of Walney Community Growing Space, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, UK	Embroidered tablecloth, decorated mugs and crockery for a multispecies supper, spoken poem (Figure 3)
D: GP referrals, long term unemployed, and students	Burscough Community Farm CIC, Burscough, Lancashire, UK	Hybrid creature models and wooden carving of multiple species navigating a flood (Figure 4)
E: College students	Rusland Valley Woodlands, Cumbria, UK	Installation representing interface of indoors and outdoors, humans and other species (Figure 5)

Figure 1. 'If We Were a Forest', copyright Lou Chapelle (2022). Photograph © 2022 Lou Chapelle. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 2. 'Journey Words of Birds and Humans', copyright Claire Dean (2022). Photograph © 2022 Claire Dean. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 3. 'The Last Supper', copyright Maddi Nicholson (2022). Photograph © 2022 Maddi Nicholson. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.

After discussion between researchers and artists to understand and explore the aims of the project (listed above), and following a brief supplied by the project team (see Appendix 1), each artist devised a series of five half- or full-day workshops according to the specific landscape, their

Figure 4. 'Here in This Place: Each Keeping Each Afloat', copyright Austin Mitchel-Hewitt (2022). Photograph © 2022 Austin Mitchell-Hewitt. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.

own expertise as creative practitioners and the characteristics of the group. Generally, the participants and artists explored the environments and their inhabitant trees, plants, insects, birds, and other species, through a range of sensory activities, involving touching, listening, tasting, and smelling. Activities also involved making things, such as whittling wooden spoons, writing poems, choreographing dance, recording a soundscape, making models, plaiting string from reeds, drawing pictures. During and after the workshops, all of these artistic activities were reflected upon and incorporated by the individual artists to culminate in a set of co-created artworks. These artworks were deemed to reflect the experiences of the participants, as mediated by the artists' skills in creative representation. At the end of the project, a travelling exhibition of the artworks was curated and held in a range of settings: two art galleries in community spaces in two towns in the North West of England; two nature reserves; and a community library. All the community participants were invited to the launch events, along with interested and non-academic audiences

Figure 5. 'Your Home is Ours…', copyright Sue Flowers (2022). Photograph © 2022 Candice Satchwell. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission.

including town councillors, a Mayor, a college principal, and representatives from Natural England and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Thereafter exhibitions were open to the public for between one and four weeks in the various settings, and subsequently available as an online exhibition (https://fromthelandtothesky.org).

All workshops and exhibitions were attended by one or more of the research team as participant observers, engaging with activities alongside participants while interacting with them informally. The researchers subsequently conducted more structured 'interviews' with participants, artists and other relevant individuals, such as members of the trust who managed the woodland, and the owner of the community farm. Fieldnotes were written up at the end of each event; most sessions were also filmed or audio-recorded, and transcripts were produced.

Full ethical approval was obtained from the universities leading the project and all participants provided informed consent after being supplied with accessible information. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw or to have their oral, written or artistic contributions deleted if they so wished. Risk assessments were carried out by researchers at each location to comply with ethical approval conditions. The project's initial timeline coincided with Covid-19-related lockdowns and social restrictions of 2020–21; while this necessitated conforming to changing social and ethical requirements, it also gave the outdoor nature of the project extra significance, given the restrictions participants had been subject to during this time.

Data analysis

Analyses of the film footage, audio recordings, fieldnotes and transcripts were undertaken by the five members of the research team through a process of individual examination, followed by paired and group discussion. By involving researchers who had experienced the workshops as participants and data-collectors, as well as team members who were viewing the data for

the first time, the analysis had both an emic and etic dimension: while we were all 'outsiders' to some extent, we situated different aspects of the data as important, not only according to our research interests and disciplines but also the amount of distance between us and the events. Through this collaborative, context-based, iterative approach, we arrived at a set of themes which had significance for the first two research aims. As noted by Hammersley (2006), these themes were not necessarily those that would have been identified by the participants themselves: we cannot claim a process of participatory analysis in this case. However, co-creation of artworks is itself a form of participatory analysis (Satchwell, Larkins, Davidge, & Carter, 2020).

The findings were categorised as:

1. Participants' experiences of the outdoor environments
   a. impact on health and well-being
   b. access and belonging
   c. social relationships and communal experiences
2. Participants' engagement with the artistic activities: multispecies and multisensory perspectives
3. Artists' perspectives
4. Reflections on the exhibitions

Findings

Participants' experiences of the outdoor environments

Generally, the experiences of the participants were overwhelmingly positive, as evidenced by their own testimony and observations of their behaviour and interaction. This is perhaps unsurprising given that workshops were tailored to suit individual groups. There was evidence of individuals feeling out of their comfort zone and expressing anxiety or apprehension, but these were always overcome by the end of the workshops. More specific examples are presented below to illustrate.

Impact on health and well-being

The group of eight college students, arriving in the woodland for the first time, emerged from a college minibus and were surprised to find themselves in an area without footpaths or built facilities. Some had not met before, while others had somewhat fractious previous relationships (as revealed by themselves and their accompanying teacher). Several were without coats and took advantage of the boots supplied on arrival. Accompanied by their teacher and two woodland workers, as well as the artist, they were introduced to their surroundings by sitting amongst trees, walking and collecting kindling for a fire, spotting animal tracks, erecting a tarpaulin, and engaging in fire-lighting, whittling, and string-making. Over time it became clear to the researcher and their teachers that they were beginning to visibly relax. One young woman articulated this as: 'Normally I have a lot of thoughts, ideas in my head. When I'm outdoors it goes quiet', and a young man said: 'Just you are here in the now, it's just being here in the space'. Another young person, who explained his complicated homelife [to Author 1] while walking side by side, said it was: 'Better than lounging on the sofa all day, watching YouTube videos' and another, asked what they would otherwise have been doing, said: 'I'd be in the house, watching TV, bored. I don't know what it is. Here, I feel more contented'. Such expressions of well-being were common in other groups too. A young autistic man missed the second workshop on the community allotment, but when he returned to the third workshop said how calm and at peace he felt. He explained: 'Monday, I, I was, it's always been the case when I've gone somewhere

new, I find it overwhelming but as, as I come back it decreases'. This person enjoyed making art and was engrossed in creating intricate drawings during the workshops. For him, the combination of art and being in a new place with others he trusted contributed to the sense of well-being he described. Contrasting the group activity with drawing at home, he said: 'When I'm doing it at home, only, only when I'm depressed, it just, it just plummets me down even further'.

For two non-verbal autistic participants it was more difficult to gauge their level of engagement or the benefits they derived. However, both actively took part in the drawing activities, albeit one of them requiring a guiding hand from a support worker. This brings into question how those who do not communicate in 'standard' modes are to be accommodated in decision-making fora, and invites comparison with the predicament of species other than human.

Access and a sense of belonging

In many of the workshops, there were issues with accessibility, not only in getting to the place but once they had arrived. On the community farm, which uses minimally invasive farming methods, there was a compost toilet, no pathways, horse flies, nettles and so on; the community allotment had only rudimentary toilet facilities; the nature reserve and woodlands had uneven terrain, insects and deer ticks (participants were advised to check themselves for ticks when they got home); and the weather ranged from extremely hot and dry to torrential rain. Despite such challenges, over the course of the workshops, participants appeared to become relatively 'at home' in these new environments, as evidenced by, for example, adapting their clothing according to weather; becoming interested in, rather than initially fearing, a wasps' nest; and returning for each subsequent workshop. Observations and participants' comments indicated that this sense of belonging in these new spaces grew as they became more familiar with them, more confident, and more relaxed. Being allowed access to these spaces was interlinked with social aspects of their experiences.

Social relationships and communal experiences

Recurring across the participants' responses were notions of the collective, relationships, and the communal. Expressions of joy about socialising with one another recurred; participants noted that, in addition to the recent Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, existing exclusionary social structures prior to these similarly limited social activity. This possibility of socialising was repeatedly placed within the context of the landscapes they now had access to. For example in preparation for one workshop, the group of disabled adults had choreographed a dance together via Zoom, combining movements that evoked their associations with nature - the breeze, trees, things growing, changing seasons, butterflies, bees, and so on - and then performed the dance at the nature reserve. One participant noted, 'I enjoyed dancing in the woods. I enjoyed the movement of the trees and how they move and how they feel'.

As a second example, a group of young people learning how to make string from willow bark stood side by side among the trees as they wove their individual lengths of string, a physical positioning and activity which induced social interaction in a way that was less easy for these participants in face-to-face situations. Similarly, activities such as making dough and toasting it around a campfire, picking fruit from bushes on a community farm, or exploring the compost heap and its resident creatures on an allotment, all created opportunities for impromptu conversations including a lot of laughter. An adult worker accompanying a group of young people said, 'I've never known them get on with one another like this'. Evident here are the possibilities of socialisation *within* natural spaces: participants placed their pleasures within the contexts of others (human and non-human) and the space itself.

Participants' engagement with artistic activities

The workshop leaders applied a multispecies multisensory approach to their delivery in a range of ways. For example, on the nature reserve, participants focused on trees: what it means to be a tree, how trees might communicate or feel, and ultimately, 'becoming' a tree. In the bird sanctuary, participating children 'became' swans; thinking about the practical everyday lives of swans - where they live, what they like or dislike, imagining themselves journeying 900 miles from Iceland to arrive in the wetlands. In the workshops on the community farm and on an allotment, participants explored aspects of nature and biodiversity through artistic expression: creating sculptures, drawings and poems as a means of connection with nature. This kind of creative thinking was designed to encourage forms of empathy and kinship unlikely in other forms of research that foreground detachment and objectivity.

Participants often expressed the value of their encounters via their relationships to the non-human. When walking through the nature reserve, two learning-disabled women described how they found solace in visiting the outdoor space and its natural inhabitants: 'If you've got any problems, there's always someone you can talk to: the trees. Because they're like a community'. Another described feeling at one with the trees: 'Being with the tree, hugging the tree and feeling like you're not on your own, no matter what happens'. The group of deaf children arriving at a bird sanctuary were visibly excited and engaged physically as well as emotionally with the place, imagining themselves as migratory birds. Understanding from the perspective of a different species was exemplified by these children who invented their own hand sign for a flamingo ('pink swan') as they knew no existing sign. In addition, they created a new way of embodying the species by standing on one leg. Further, one of the children wrote a postcard in what they called 'duck code'. These creations of new ways of communicating were taken up by the artist, who also identified as deaf: she imagined an invented language of birds, and in the resulting artwork this language was represented by a series of framed pictures displaying sticks in different configurations (Figure 2).

Thus, the perceived benefits of the workshops extended to a sense of connection to nature and to other species: a participant at the community farm remarked, 'We're all connected, even us and the weeds and the wildlife. It's a way of thinking'. This connection could be seen as being taken to an extreme when these participants suggested that perhaps the farm should be left to nature and allowed to return to a flooded plain: 'If this land floods, nature will always come. It'll come in many shapes and forms, I'm sure. It may arrive like this [points to hybrid creature sculpture]. Something a bit unusual, something we've never seen before'. His companion agreed: 'I think what we're learning is you can't fight nature, it'll always win'. This openness to allowing nature to reclaim the land was a remarkable outcome of this set of workshops. Even though these people were experiencing the benefits of engaging with this place and working on the farm, the connection they subsequently felt to the natural world provided a sense of empathy with nature itself.

Artists' perspectives

The multiplicity of the ways in which the multisensory multispecies brief was interpreted speaks to the diverse range of methods and subsequent impacts that creative approaches can facilitate. The artist who led the workshops on the community farm saw an opportunity to connect with 'the story of a place', 'whether that be the story of how the environment changes through the year, or the story of how humans impact that environment'. On the nature reserve, the artist's approach challenged a purely 'human perspective'. Yet this artist spoke of the difficulty of inviting participants to engage in the 'abstract thinking' involved, and emphasised the importance of creating a comfortable and creative space: 'If you just say - okay, you turn into a tree now, it's quite a strange thing to ask and a hard thing to do'. Participants had to be willing to engage

and to be 'open-minded' in order to 'think about the world a little differently, which is what art is about anyway; thinking about things a little differently'.

The artist running the workshops in the bird sanctuary saw the multispecies multisensory remit as being about 'taking steps towards' an 'interspecies perspective'. She noted that planning for workshops was also necessarily informed - or uprooted - by the environment itself. The practical effort of investigating and navigating an unpredictable environment was multiplied due to the vulnerable nature of the workshops' participants. The project's research methods - ethnographic as well as artistic - involved being attentive to the particularities of circumstance, and responsive to moments, individuals, and contexts.

Reflecting on the collaborative nature of co-creating an artwork with community groups, the woodlands artist described her role as facilitator of, 'an open process where all ideas matter. Every individual matters. Absolutely anything that anybody creates matters'. Commenting on an anxiety people sometimes felt in relation to their artistic contributions, she explained, 'It's not about skills, it's not about craft. It's not about anything other than what people think and feel, and that all goes into this funnel and we work together to try and envisage what might come out at the end'. The co-production approach was therefore evident in the artwork production as part of a project that aimed to be *with*, *by* and *for* participants (Nind, 2014, p. 3).

Reflections on the exhibition

Participants were delighted to see their outputs in a public forum. Many had never been to an art gallery, and certainly had not exhibited in one. While the artworks were presented in the name of the artist, the creation of each was wholly dependent on the contributions of the group. The learning-disabled adults were particularly excited to see their work *If We Were a Forest* …, which included several appearing in a film along with their movements, sounds and poems created in the workshops. Another artwork, *The Last Supper*, included an embroidered tablecloth and crockery representing the ideas and drawings created by the group of autistic young people. This was presented along with a soundtrack of a co-created poem which had been skilfully assembled by a visiting poet during a quick-fire question and answer session, inscribed on a roll of wallpaper. The artwork *Your Home is Ours* represented young people's reflections on how they felt they were intruding on other species' homes while in the woods. A white table and four chairs represent the human need for control over their environment; while a commercially made stag, an owl and a mouse placed on the table under a rickety construct of twigs and on a handmade paper rug with grass tassels, exemplified the interface of the human and natural world. The artwork challenges the assumption of human dominance over other species, while reflecting the humour of the interactions among participants, artist and researcher while conceptualising the piece. The artist remembered 'an element of playfulness and experimentation' which is captured in the work itself.

The intention was that the research team, artists, participants, and decision-makers would mingle side-by-side at the exhibitions, disrupting conventional power hierarchies, with decision-makers visiting a space inhabited by the project participants and their artworks. However, in reality, we might question the extent to which the exhibitions fulfilled this aim. While some of the participants visited the gallery exhibitions, others did not. Schoolchildren and college students were unable to travel to the sites, even though funding was offered for transport; a member of the young autistic group was brought by a parent, but others stayed away. On the other hand, discussions with Defra/Natural England led to the offer of additional exhibition sites on nature reserves to accommodate spreading the alternative outlooks demonstrated by the artworks. The exhibitions were originally seen as sites for provocation and debate; but the issue of 'translating' art into words - upon which decision-making is usually based - remains an issue with which the Landscape Decisions Programme continues to grapple.

Discussion

Methodologically, the project's combination of participatory principles and the co-production of artworks, accords with creative practice which responds to critiques of the normalisation of 'putatively "objective" and "neutral" speaking positions' (Brewster, 2009, p. 127). This places this work in dialogue with recent moves to decolonise, de-Westernize, and otherwise critique the norms which underpin dominant forms of research (Prinsloo, 2016; Seppälä et al., 2021), with outputs that 'challenge traditional ways of presenting research findings' (Haseman, 2007, p. 148). Our findings above indicate that the creative methods enabled the fulfilment of the first two project aims in that the participants engaged positively with inclusive experiences of natural landscapes. Methods of expression beyond primarily linguistic and ocular channels were embraced by working together with artists and drawing on multiple modes and senses. Imagining life from the perspectives of other species that might inhabit those natural environments enabled participants to see and feel differently, not only about their environment but about their positions as humans. The project enabled groups who might normally be marginalised in such spaces to contribute to the co-production and exhibition of innovative artworks. To this extent the project proved beneficial in a range of ways. However, the challenges of achieving this and of meeting the third and fourth aims, which relate to impact on decision-making processes, are not insubstantial.

It was only through the project, and its funding for transport, artists, and access, that we were able to challenge societal structural factors that hinder accessibility to nature, and begin to facilitate participants' burgeoning sense of legitimacy in voicing the value of particular outdoor spaces for themselves. Although artists provided access to open and creative thinking, which allowed participants to respond via multiple strategies - such as dancing or making woodland sounds - these might typically be rendered of less value because they do not align with dominant norms of decision-making. In this respect, participants themselves were aware of their invisibility and marginalisation: 'I think a lot of it's not in our hands. Powerful people, people who are in charge of the world, they don't care. They need to be more sympathetic. The pursuit of money's ruthless, isn't it' (participant on community farm). The project evidently created spaces for people from these marginalised groups to explore and communicate their views on nature and landscape, extending knowledge about access and disability. But it also highlighted challenges to destabilising existing decision-making paradigms, given the norms these adopt.

During the project, the participants repeatedly situated humans as only equal to, or of less significance than, the flora and fauna of the spaces they were visiting. This has real significance for the framing of policy and the research that underpins it. For example, in its outline of its key aims, Defra persistently prioritises the human, stating its work is for 'the next [human] generation', focussing on 'the food we eat, and the air we breathe, to the water we drink' (2023). Rejecting this anthropocentric view of landscapes and the 'services' they provide for humans, some participants' expressions of 'multispecies justice' (Celermajer et al., 2021) went beyond species to encompass places as a whole, significantly decentring the human as the main decision-making priority. There remains a double-bind here, then, for participants expressed opinions far outside of the norms of such debates, and via the creative projects did so in ways typically not seen as legitimate in such decision-making.

Conclusion

The creative approaches adopted by this project enabled participants in North-West England not only to communicate their responses and opinions, but to see them as valid and worth consideration. The participatory nature of the workshops, conducted in local natural areas, presented a challenge to processes of socio-cultural marginalisation, which are often embedded in 'traditional' research methods and confounded by issues of access, including poor public transport

links. That the project was multisensory and aimed for multispecies awareness also helped trouble dominant anthropocentric conceptualisations of landscape, and conventional notions of equality, diversity and inclusion that understand those concepts only in terms of the human.

However, encouraging individual decision-makers to rethink their understandings of landscapes and their meanings - as evidenced by responses from attendees at exhibitions - is not equivalent to having an impact on policy decisions about landscapes. Therefore the next step is to find ways for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, including the more-than-human, in influencing policy about land use, access and environmental issues. This applies not only in the specific regional context that is discussed here but is relevant more widely to global landscape decision-making contexts and wherever inequalities in access to natural spaces occur. That step, we suggest, includes shifting the foci and methods of decision-making from their contemporary norms, to more inclusive processes that make space for responses that are particular, local and situated, and cognisant of those who are all-too-often assumed to be absent in those landscapes.

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Appendix 1: Artists' brief

Multispecies storytelling approaches ask: 'what happens when we experience from another being's perspective?' These approaches can help to develop connections between humans and the natural world. The multispecies multisensory artefacts from this project will therefore ask audiences to think about and experience landscape in ways they may not have encountered before and take account of how a diversity of perceptual experiences of landscape can inform decision making about landscape and land use. The artefacts produced will explore perspectives, scales, and sensory experiences other than those that take a 'typically' human viewpoint or that privilege traditional forms of ocularcentrism (perceptual bias).

Aims

- To explore ways of examining engagements with landscape that are inclusive, drawing on notions of multispecies and the multisensory to achieve this.
- To facilitate the co-production of innovative artworks to convey community meanings of landscape through multiple perspectives and senses.
- To communicate with decision-makers, particularly in local government, about landscape through the experiences of marginalised groups, represented through multisensory art.
- To foster longer-term working relationships that can continue to inform decision-making processes and outcomes related to landscape and land-use.

Objectives

- To facilitate at least five workshops which will build on relationships developed during the original two projects (including community farm users, disabled/disadvantaged young people; asylum seekers and GP referrals), with the addition of autistic young people accessed through the National Autistic Society, in collaboration with arts practitioners using multispecies and multisensory approaches.
- To develop and curate artworks, installations and other forms of creative experiences that draw on, and articulate, multispecies and multisensory engagements with landscape.
- To present that exhibitory material in a number of relevant sites (both indoor and outdoor), enabling as wide as possible a range of engagement with the material.
- To bring relevant stakeholders and decision makers together at exhibitions to understand and make use of the contributions made by the diverse groups involved in these projects.
- To facilitate ongoing collaborative dialogue on matters relating to landscape use through the networking and dissemination mechanisms developed in 'Connecting disadvantaged young people with landscape through arts' and 'Multispecies storytelling'.