

# Understanding landscape change: a collaborative philosophical enquiry



WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between Department of Philosophy, University of Sheffield and the Peak District National Park Authority

## Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

Dr Megan Blomfield

Department of  
Philosophy

University of Sheffield

Anna Badcock

Cultural Heritage Manager

Peak District National Park  
Authority



## Project summary

Our landscapes are changing and climate change is a major factor. Climate variables are no longer fixed, broadly predictable influences at landscape scales. We now need to reconsider and modify landscape conservation objectives in light of climate change. This is a truly significant challenge. We will need to be flexible and, sometimes, radical in our approaches. We will need to facilitate rapid change in the landscape to accommodate new scenarios and to critically question our existing ideas and understandings of landscape. We need new tools to enable us to better articulate, share and evaluate these difficult choices.

This project will enhance our understanding of landscape change. It will do so by formulating a definition of landscape change that can be used by practitioners and policymakers in the UK land sector; and by designing principles to evaluate different kinds of landscape change.

## PhD Project description



Landscape change is a fact of life, but the present climate crisis means that such change is unprecedented in speed and scale. The Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) has undertaken to monitor landscape change in the National Park, and to better understand how people appreciate evolving landscapes.

But what is landscape change? We need an answer to this question if we are to place this work on a solid foundation. Any answer must be attentive to the fact that no landscape is ever truly static: landscapes evolve. When should the inevitable evolution of a landscape be deemed significant enough to constitute a landscape *change*? And what kinds of change can a landscape go through, before it becomes a different landscape altogether?

The student will approach these questions by working closely with the PDNPA to find out more about the work that they are undertaking; who this work is intended to serve; and how a definition of landscape change might help the PDNPA to realise their goals. The student will use tools of ethical and political philosophy to address the normative questions of which kinds of landscape change are desirable and should be implemented or welcomed, and which kinds of landscape change are undesirable and should be mitigated or resisted.

The student will have significant scope to mould the project by deciding which philosophical tools, theories and frameworks they will draw on to support the research. Some of the questions that the student may consider are:

1. How might landscape change be defined? Which way of defining landscape change achieves the best balance between theoretical soundness and practical application?
2. What values (e.g. ecological, cultural, aesthetic) can be realised or destroyed by landscape change?
3. Are certain *kinds* of landscape change most disposed to realise or destroy such values? (e.g. slow versus rapid)
4. Do certain *processes* of landscape change better realise such values? (e.g. because they are more or less 'natural' or 'artificial')
5. How should we judge landscape changes when such values are in tension with one another – for example, when changes that would enhance the ecological value of a landscape would also be judged to reduce its aesthetic or cultural value?
6. Are certain kinds of response to landscape change – including emotional responses – more apt or fitting?

### **About the Peak District National Park Authority**

The Peak District National Park was the first national park designated in the UK. Established in 1951, it covers an area of 555 square miles south of the Pennines, between the urban centres of Sheffield and Manchester.

The project will support the objectives of the PDNPA. One of the aims of the new National Park Management Plan is that the park is a resilient landscape in which nature, beauty and cultural heritage are significantly enhanced. Understanding landscape change is crucial to this aim.

## Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

The student will directly influence how the PDNPA understands, defines and communicates landscape change. At a time of significant pressures and drivers (including climate change resilience, carbon capture, nature recovery, 'wilder' landscapes etc) the cultural complexity of landscapes is sometimes overshadowed. The student will help us explore how we can develop a language around landscape 'values' and articulate landscape complexity. This will help us deliver our agendas and goals, and contribute more effectively to the development of national policy.

A key impact initiative will be developing a robust evidence base to better understand how people appreciate the evolving landscape, and how the PDNPA can better communicate landscape change to different audiences. This will be refined and tested through public surveys and interviews.

One of the project's outcomes will be guidance on whether the concept of landscape change is an appropriate mechanism for helping the PDNPA to broaden its reach and to engage with a greater diversity of audiences. The studentship will engage directly with the National Park's Diverse Audience Plan and Engagement Team in this research strand.

The research will involve working with Ranger Teams as key ambassadors for the National Park 'on the ground'. Key messages and ideas generated by the research will be synthesised into a toolkit that will be used during the PDNPA's Ranger-led walks to engage visitors and residents with landscape change. These themes will also feed into Youth Ranger activities and programmes, inspiring a new generation of landscape ambassadors.

The PDNPA will support and facilitate public talks on the approach and results of the research. The research will be promoted through the freely-distributed magazine 'Archaeology And Conservation in Derbyshire'. This will be a valuable tool for engaging the wider public in the research and disseminating the outcomes.

---

## Financial support

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2023; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a maintenance grant (£17,668 in 2022/23). The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of Sheffield for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time by the terms of their visa.

---

## Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Distinction at Master's degree (or be working towards one) and/or professional experience relevant to the scope of the project.

## Requirements of the Studentship

WRoCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and to engage with Internationalisation.

All WRoCAH students must submit their thesis for examination with the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WRoCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

**Before applying for any WRoCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WRoCAH webpages about the WRoCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities**

**<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>**

## How to apply

By 5pm Wednesday 26 April 2023, applicants are required to submit to WRoCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

*The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:*

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
- How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
- How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.

Expressions of Interest must be [submitted via this form](#).

- **2 May 2023: decision on short-listing**

The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Tuesday 2 May 2023. *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.* If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of Sheffield. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.

- **w/c 22 May 2023: interviews**

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

## For more information about this project contact

Dr Megan Blomfield (m.blomfield@sheffield.ac.uk)

Anna Badcock (Anna.Badcock@peakdistrict.gov.uk)