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The (un)common good: diverging justifications for wilderness making in a modified landscape

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Abstract

Wilderness is most often conceived as comprising large remote areas where evidence of human influence is slight. Little attention has been afforded to the study of wilderness 'making' in smaller landscapes that have been heavily modified by human activity. This paper addresses this knowledge deficit by employing the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot to analyse a case study of wilderness making in the west of Ireland. The application of this framework illustrates how contending positions on 'why' wilderness making should occur and 'how' it should be conducted reflect ethical frameworks rooted in different conceptions of the 'common good' presented by the idea of wilderness. The paper demonstrates the difficulties with developing such a new nature-based concept in the absence of conventional (received) ideas of wilderness by revealing how the diverging justifications used suggest incommensurability in the competing notions of wilderness that are formulated and advanced.

Keywords: Justification, common good, wilderness, Boltanski and Thévenot

Introduction

The study of wilderness has grown steadily in recent years, with researchers and popular writers expounding its merits for biodiversity conservation, human health and recreation among other issues (Barton et al., 2016, Foreman, 2004, Hammitt et al., 2015, Williams, 2017, Wuerthner et al., 2015). This burgeoning literature is set against a backdrop of debate regarding the ontology of wilderness, with occasional polarisation between ‘realists’ who view it as an objectively existing entity and ‘social-constructivists’ who contend that wilderness is an inter-subjective concept that primarily exists consequent on the meanings given to it (Cole and Yung, 2012, Cronon, 1996, Nelson and Callicott, 2008, Braun and Castree, 1998). Some have sidestepped this schism focusing on a descriptive explanation of how wilderness comes into being, generating what is real in its components but socially constructed in its arrangement (Vannini and Vannini, 2016). Others have focused on the critical political ecology of wilderness examining issues surrounding rights of access to land and marginalisation of community interests (Neumann, 2002).

Nevertheless, these debates are united by a shared focus on large tracks of remote lands unmodified by modern agricultural practices or significant human settlement (Allin, 2008, Turner and Cronon, 2012). Considerably less attention has been allocated to the study of wilderness creation in the context of extensively modified landscapes, characterising much of Europe. Where these issues are discussed, they are usually examined within the context of ‘rewilding’ rather than ‘wilderness’ (Brown et al., 2011, Navarro and Pereira, 2012). However, as noted by Prior and Brady (2017), these two concepts are often conflated, when in practice rewilding concerns reinstating self-directed ecological processes, whereas wilderness is a perception on the attributes of space (Bastmeijer, 2016a, Chapman, 2006). In this sense, rewilding may occur at range of scales from urban (Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012) to entire landscapes (Pereira and Navarro, 2016). In contrast, the very concept of wilderness implies an interpretation of remoteness, spaciousness and wildness. Hence, ‘wilderness’ is more accurately understood as a subtly different, yet distinct *interpretive category* with land management practices that may well encompass, but nevertheless extend beyond rewilding (Cole and Yung, 2012).

Thus, if wilderness implies an interpretation reflected in land management practices, the question arises as to what interpretation is given expression and why. Such issues are particularly pertinent in the case of wilderness ‘making’ in modified landscapes, where

references to the received ecological condition of a landscapes 'untrammelled by man' are unfeasible (Turner and Cronon, 2012). Hence, this paper addresses a dearth in our understanding regarding wilderness making in modified landscapes. Specifically, the paper explores how different perceptions on the benefits of wilderness are given expression in debates on how wilderness 'should' be conceived as a landscape-shaping idea with potentially significant spatial and temporal influence. Accordingly, this paper goes beyond mere description by focusing on how normative concepts subtly profile the creation of wilderness ideas that ultimately give shape to wilderness spaces.

This task is undertaken through a case study of wilderness making in Ireland. The case involves exploring and analysingⁱ the views of influential actors in key organisations that have come together in an effort to create Ireland's first wilderness. The empirical research entailed the triangulation of information obtained from three sources:

- (1) An examination of newspaper reports, official webpages, blog posts and a video about the project.
- (2) A close reading of the multi-authored feasibility study report produced with respect to the project whose respective chapters reveal differing opinions on wilderness conception and management (Murphy et al., 2011).
- (3) An analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 stakeholders central to the project's conception and progression. The interviews were conducted with all those deeply involved in: (a) the project's conception; (b) and/or in providing expert advice to those advancing the project; (c) and/or those deemed as crucial support by project promoters. The interviewees range from those embedded in the organisations advancing the project (see below), to local authority officials, those in recreation and conservation non-governmental organisations, and experts contracted to provide services.

Each viewpoint evidenced in the material sought legitimacy via reference to a particular vision for the wilderness area grounded in a conception of the 'common good'. To understand how different standpoints were justified in the context of the common good, the paper draws upon a rarely used theoretical framework in environmental ethics, policy and planning (however see Arts et al., 2017; Cowell and Devine-Wright, 2018). This framework derives from research at the intersection of French (continental) philosophy and pragmatic sociology. The next section outlines this theoretical framework. The subsequent section introduces the

case study and then applies the theoretical framework in an analysis of empirical material. A discussion of the foregoing follows before the conclusion section closes the paper with a summary of what has been learnt.

Theoretical Framework

The imperative to justify

The work of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) presents a response to problems they identify with analytical approaches influenced by the structuralist sociology of luminaries such as Bourdieu (2013) and Marx (Ollman, 1976). For Boltanski and Thévenot, these structuralist approaches overdetermine human activity by evacuating moral agency from explanations of lived experience through foregrounding formative cultural constraints or differential access to resources (Wagner, 1999). Hence, Boltanski and Thévenot endeavour to reinstate the interpreting moral-political agent via a 'pragmatic sociology' (Blokker, 2011) that centralises the reflective aptitude of agents to validate the views they advance. At the heart of this perspective is recognition of an 'imperative to justify' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, 37) the arguments one makes in seeking to legitimise the case one is attempting to progress. They reason that justifying arguments cannot simply hold validity for the limited number of persons present. Instead, they must appeal to an antecedent authority that renders them robust in questioning by an unknown number of new interlocutors. This antecedent authority thereby constitutes a shared axiom that facilitates appeal to a principle that is valid in generality. It is in this context that Boltanski and Thévenot note how their theory 'does not posit any universals to begin with, but poses universality as a horizon searched after by individuals' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000, 210). Thus, central to their theory is that people possess a 'metaphysical capacity' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2000, 213) to reason forms of common goods. Such common goods are thought to be ordinarily recognisable and thereby support the legitimacy of the rationalities offered in a line of argument. In this way, the reflective aptitude of people to appeal to a higher-order and generalizable common good in formulating and seeking to legitimate their views is conceived as reinstating moral-political agency in human activity, such as interpreting what wilderness may legitimately mean in the context of a modified landscape. However, key to the model of justification is that different constituencies identify different common goods. Consequently, there are several 'orders of worth'.

Orders of worth

Boltanski and Thévenot hold uncertainty and inquietude to be an always present and potentially destabilising aspect of the social world. In their view, worldly engagement requires overcoming such uncertainty and inquietude to enable action (Thévenot, 2007). This involves justifying one's arguments by a coherent moral logic referred to as an argument's 'principle of equivalence' that facilitates the politics of debate (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, 147). Nevertheless, there is not a single such logic. Rather, there are several, which 'provide a plurality of criteria of justification, related to a plurality of views of the common good, which are understood as in principle irreducible and between which no ultimate hierarchy can be identified' (Blokker, 2011, 252). Hence, there are multiple 'orders of worth' that offer different foundations for legitimacy and supply different modes of determining what the common good entails. Boltanski and Thévenot initially identified six different orders of worth based upon detailed readings of canonical texts in political philosophy: the civic order; the order of opinionⁱⁱ; the order of inspiration; the domestic order; the market order; and the industrial order (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

The *Social Contract* by Jean Jacques Rousseau exemplifies the 'civic order' and is referenced to the principle of solidarity or collective welfare. In this order, rules, regulations and policies are designed to protect the 'worth' of shared rights of equal citizens (Thévenot et al., 2000). In the context of environmental policy, the logic of the civic order can be witnessed in policy approaches underpinned by environmental justice perspectives, such as those evident in the Convention on Biological Diversity and the subsequent Nagoya Protocol which establish a suite of policies aimed at ensuring the 'fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources' (UNEP, 2011). *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes represents the 'order of opinion' wherein worth is referenced to renown, with its measurement determined by conventional signs of public opinion. Here, the role of fame functions to provide proof that those things, people and places allocated attention are indeed worthy of such. In the context of environmental policy this can be observed in the influence of celebrity on shaping the focus and objectives of nature conservation activities (Brockingham, 2009, Huggan, 2013). In contrast, the 'order of inspiration' is referenced to creativity, grace and singularity. It is exemplified by St Augustine's *City of God* wherein 'worth is viewed as an immediate relationship to an external source from which all possible worth

flows' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 370). It is characterised by emotional expression and response. In this sense, 'the "proof" for inspiration justifications is the display of an emotion, or otherwise showing that one is moved or overwhelmed or awed' (Thévenot et al., 2000, 252). At first blush this may seem liable to criticism for being subjective and impossible to issue justifications referenced to a principle of equivalence that is generalisable. However, research by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) illustrates how the very idea of 'inspiration' when associated with a positive affective response forms a mode of evaluation for validating actions. Examples in the context of environmental policy include the seemingly legitimate prioritisation of conservation initiatives for specific species consequent on emotional attachment (e.g. patriotism in the case of the bald eagle in the USA) or in debates concerning the aesthetic value of landscapes (e.g. John Muir's arguments for the protection of the Hetch Hetchy Valley during the Hetch Hetchy dam controversy). Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet's *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* epitomises the 'domestic order' in which traditions, personal dependencies and an established hierarchy of trust predominate. Here, locality and custom supply the grounding for perceptions of worth. In the context of environmental policy, this can be observed in responses to regulatory change wherein tradition is seen to justify extractive activities, such as peat harvesting (O'Riordan et al, 2016) and fishing rights (Ban and Frid, 2018). The evaluative framework advanced by Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* exemplifies the 'market order'. Accordingly, a competitive market of exchangeable goods underpins the principle of equivalence permeating this order. In the context of environmental policy, such logic can be witnessed in calls for the increased use of market-based instruments, such as the payment for ecosystems services (Bishop and Hill, 2014) and in debates concerning ecotourism (Fennell, 2014). The works of the French theorist Henri de Saint-Simon illustrate the 'industrial order'. In this order, justifications are conceived in terms of technical and scientific competency. In this sense,

*.....the bases for evaluation in this category are different from market criteria.
[Rather,] technical competency justifications place value on the efficiency of
investments, professional planning and expertise, and long-term growth
(Thévenot et al., 2000, 243).*

In the context of environmental policy, this order of worth can be seen as operative in ecological restoration initiatives, targeted at the long-term efficient and effective recovery of ecosystems (Clewell and Aronson, 2013).

In subsequent research and working separately, Thévenot has identified an additional order: the 'environmental order' (Thévenot et al., 2000). This order is not grounded in a deep reading of a canonical text. Instead it is rooted in an analysis of the widespread and ever more refined justifications advanced by environmentalists in recent decades, although having important historical and cultural antecedents predating the modern era (Coates, 1998, Nash, 2014, Oelschlaeger, 1991). The common good in this order has a distinct spatial and temporal extension whose scope expands beyond the bounds of locality to the planet, and encompasses future generations (Thévenot et al, 2000).

Boltanski and Thévenot assert that the orders of worth they have identified is not a definitive list and that it is conceivable that other orders of worth currently exist in different contexts. It is believed that the forms of argumentation exemplified by these classical texts are historically sedimented in modern society such that they are 'most of the time encapsulated in an implicit form in the arguments exchanged during the course of action' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 366). They suggest that 'compromise' is common between different orders of worth in fixing the sense of moral-political certainty necessary to facilitate action in a given sphere of activity (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, 277). Thus, different relative weights may be given different principles of equivalence in advancing arguments. Although not initially acknowledged in this theory as first articulated (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 2000), subsequent work by Thévenot et al (2000) suggests that it is probable that one order of worth will achieve prominence in such justifications and be used as the primary conceptual vehicle upon which the others are given relevance (see also Arts et al., 2017). For example, in activity concerning the recreational use of wilderness environments, the market, the environmental, the industrial and the inspired orders of worth may all coalesce, with different modes of evaluation vying for dominance: profit accrued from tourists; technical competency in meeting the management requirements of ecological conservation; and the affective response of visitors. Furthermore, such configurations mean that the principle of equivalence characterising one order of worth can flow across others and influence how a value is determined in another order of worthⁱⁱⁱ.

'Testing' the common good

Locating how such configurations influence the justifications advanced for different policy approaches involves identifying how different people, objects and ideas are coordinated in

drawing support for a particular argument. Boltanski and Thévenot refer to this coordinating process as 'qualification'. Thus, 'In order to be engaged as a probe of justifications, objects (or persons or events) need to be "qualified" according to the particular order of worth' (Thévenot et al., 2000, 237). Consequently, appreciating how different orders of worth, compromises or other configurations are given force in policy activity necessitates attention to how different people, objects and ideas are employed in the particularities of a policy debate. Indeed, Boltanski and Thévenot view the analysis of these uses as residing at the heart of how their approach provides an understanding of the ways in which peoples' critical capacity shapes reality. Hence, they note that whenever people, objects or ideas are referenced in arguments, 'the state in which they operate is always qualified at the same time. The relation between these person-states and thing-states (what we define as a *situation*) is the object of our study' (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, 1: emphasis in original). Therefore, examining how people, objects and ideas are qualified in the context of different forms of justifications in a specific 'situation' provides an avenue for exploring how different concepts of the common good are given expression and effect in shaping our world. This is particularly germane in 'situations' of unresolved debate, such as those concerning how to create a wilderness in a modified landscape. This is because a dearth of conventional referents may stimulate a diversity of viewpoints rooted in different conceptions of what the common good entails and how it is best realised. In this context, a crucial consideration in the act of justification is the 'test'. This is the point at which a principle of equivalence confronts both the reality of the world identified by those employing the test, and the orders of worth advanced by others in a particular situation. The choice to deploy a specific test in validating one's position during a period of uncertainty and inquietude thereby represents an attempt to give a particular order of worth priority in the decision-making process. It is to be expected that different orders of worth be characterised by different tests that assess different forms of information^{iv}. Accordingly: the civic order tests the degree to which equality and solidarity are realised; the order of opinion relies on tests of popularity and recognition; the order of inspiration uses emotional involvement, response and expression to rank experience in terms of affective engagement, enthusiasm and a sense of adventure or quest; the domestic order advances tests of respect for tradition and trustworthiness; the market order employs tests of market competitiveness; the industrial order tests reliability and scientific competence in planning; and the environmental order focuses on tests of

sustainability. This framework is now applied to the Irish case study to: (a) tease apart the forms of justifications for the project used by different stakeholders; (b) identify how this reflects different concepts of the common good to be delivered by the initiative; and (c) ascertain what concept of wilderness different stakeholders believe should be implemented.

The Wild Nephin Initiative

Project backdrop

The Ballycroy National Park is Ireland's sixth and most recent addition to the state's national park system. Managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the park is situated on Ireland's remote western seaboard. The park comprises '11,000 hectares of Atlantic blanket bog and mountainous terrain' and is 'part of the Natura 2000 Network, protected under the EU Habitats and Birds Directive' (NPWS, 2017). Contiguous to the eastern boarder of the national park is a continuous block of commercial forestry lands encompassing an area of 4,606 hectares. These lands are managed by 'Coillte', the commercial semi-state company set up in 1989 to administer state owned forests. The area is characterised by a varied topography that creates challenges for commercial forestry. Nevertheless, 'The area is currently managed as a production forest with the predominant species being Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and lodge pole pine (*Pinus contorta*) (Murphy et al., 2011, 2:2).

In March 2013, the NPWS and Coillte signed a Memorandum of Understanding to create a wilderness area from the combined Ballycroy National Park and Coillte lands. This is to be known as the 'Wild Nephin' project. The project envisions a fifteen-year timeline to convert the existing Coillte lands to wilderness. In seeking to advance the concept, a number of stakeholders were invited to become members of the project's steering committee. These include Mayo County Council, in whose administrative area both these landholdings are situated, and Fáilte Ireland (the national tourism agency). National and international profile was given the initiative by a project conference hosted in May 2013, in which the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) issued a personal endorsement for the concept. Other speakers at the conference included the director of Baxter State Park in Maine, USA, the director of the Wild Europe Initiative and the Deputy Head of the Nature Unit of the Directorate-General for the Environment in the European Commission. Thus, by the summer of 2013 the idea of creating a wilderness in Ireland emerged as something endorsed at the highest political level, had received international attention and enjoyed support from an array of key national

agencies. However, whilst combining the Collite lands with those of the Ballycroy National Park may help overcome the 'impossible spatiality of wilderness' (Lorimer and Driessen, 2014, 175) in a relatively small nation, how to 'convert' the Coillte lands to wilderness in the context of a heavily modified landscape poses a series of difficult questions about what 'wilderness' may mean. It is against this backdrop that differences have arisen in ways of conceiving wilderness, its functions, and how wilderness making should be undertaken. Each such interpretation involves reasoning that prioritises a specific and generalisable common good whose advancement facilitates the realisation of other common goods^v. In this context, three competing configurations of orders of worth are evident. This study suggests that these three configurations emerged contemporaneously, rather than consecutively or in response to each other. Each configuration is identifiable by the particular order of worth that is allocated prominence in the line of reasoning advanced. Furthermore, the order of worth given prominence delineates how 'qualification' operates in a particular justificatory discourse by specifying what counts as relevant. Hence, the concept of the common good in the dominant order of worth in a particular configuration structures the meaning-making process that seeks to legitimise the argument for wilderness making that is being advanced. This arrangement is revealed in the 'test' of legitimacy employed when seeking to determine if the common good is being realised. However, a close examination of the feasibility study report and the analysis of interview material reveal that the series of different tests developed 'To examine the suitability of the Nephin Forest as a wilderness' (Murphy et al., 2011, 1:4) reflects different perspectives on what defines a wilderness, and thereby helps justify contending arguments on how to conceive and create a wilderness in a modified landscape.

The scientific configuration: 'environmental-industrial orders'

Those aligned with the 'scientific' configuration were primarily drawn from professionals in the fields of environmental management and nature conservation. They sought to justify the need to protect the environment as a common good that is generalisable beyond the spatial and temporal horizons of the Wild Nephin project. From this perspective, the Wild Nephin project presents an opportunity to address deficits in peoples' approach to the environment by supplying an opportunity to reverse the wrongs wreaked upon it. This outlook was conveyed by an interviewee stating,

I suppose our kind of view is that the Irish landscape has been denuded both of species and of former habitats and we'd like to do what we could to restore that
(Interviewee B4).

Promoting the restoration of ecosystems is seen as a justified activity that legitimately motivates interest in the project. This belief is illustrated in the assertions of an interviewee aligned with this configuration affirming,

...my long-term goal would be to make sure that if we achieve nothing else, my first priority is to ensure to maintain the freshwater, water quality and the habitat in the catchments (Interviewee B1).

From this perspective, natural habitats become objects of concern as the science of ecosystem health and conservation become ideas that count in the 'qualification' process that allocates weight to matters of significance. This shapes the perceived validity of those scientific knowledges that underpin arguments to justify the creation of a wilderness. This environmental order of worth contours a sense of generalisable value that advances professionalism, scientific information and management planning as laudable items resonant with the industrial order of worth. Hence, a series of objects and practices become 'qualified', wherein measurable scientific criteria are deemed matters of import in realising the common good of ecosystems health. Accordingly, the 'test' developed from this perspective for the evaluation of the suitability of the Coillte lands as a location for wilderness making states:

The test we applied is that an area should share 40% of its boundary with an SAC, SPA, NHA^{vi} or national park and the area should have potential within its boundaries to significantly contribute to biodiversity and or nature conservation
(Murphy et al., 2011, 8:3).

A further criterion was set that a minimum of 20% of the total site be specifically managed for nature conservation. Measured against these criteria it was determined that 'the area had sufficient nature conservation value to support forest designation as a wilderness area' (Murphy et al., 2011, 1:6).

Such environmental-order infused industrial-order approaches to realising the common good are reflected in the practices proposed in transitioning the Coillte lands to the concept of 'wilderness' given modality within this evaluative framework. For example, one interviewee sketched the ecological management methods deemed appropriate in

transforming the landscape to an interpretation of wilderness making centred on a calibrated transition of habitat classifications,

Like we are going to manage it, we're going to put in management prescriptions...we're going to have trees in zone B and heath in zone C and...acidic grassland in zone Z and kinda montane above that in zone F. (Interviewee B4).

A key issue of importance (item qualified) from this perspective is the danger posed by non-native invasive species, such as rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), to the realisation of the landscape's ecological enhancement, as 'Where these species invade, they often kill both ground vegetation layers and prohibit natural regeneration of woody plants' (Murphy et al., 2011, 8:6). Controlling these is seen as fundamental to achieving the common good. Nevertheless, an awareness of how fulfilling this crucial objective potentially places the Wild Nephin project in tension with conventional interpretations of 'wilderness' is conveyed by one interviewee:

*You know, people say managed wilderness is a contradiction; the wilderness should be wild. There's all sort of people who have quotes on wilderness: a wilderness area is untrammelled, free from human influence. All these various quotes exist out there. But in these circumstances, we can't apply that because of, as I said, that invasive species, *Rhododendron ponticum*. If we ignore that, then it's flying in the face of everything that I had hoped to develop in the area (Interviewee B1).*

Hence, in this configuration the critical capacity to reflect on where the common good lies, and consequently on how it should be realised in the context of wilderness making, is both informed by and grounded in environmental sciences. This view employs scientific expertise and the management of species composition through measurable criteria that justify intervention to control unwanted flora deemed a threat to the maintenance and enhancement of an aspired environmental quality. Thus, from the perspective of this configuration, it is the striving to enhance environmental quality that is tacitly acknowledged as the principle of equivalence that legitimises the Wild Nephin project.

The experience configuration: 'inspired-environmental orders'

While most of those interviewed mentioned the importance of 'experience' in the making of wilderness, those aligned with the experience configuration specifically justify their outlook

by referencing the common good of providing people with a direct experience of nature. From this perspective, the Wild Nephin project offers an opportunity to create a space to engage people's 'metaphysical imagination' (Hepburn, 1996) by facilitating,

A particular kind of quietness, an enjoyment of solitude, an enjoyment of the sky, of the vistas. A reflection on where they are and what they're doing there. And even some historic thing, like where did this place come from and all of that (Interviewee A2).

Hence, this configuration stresses how the experience of nature supplies the necessary conditions for reflection and a sense of 'connection'. Within this framework, subjective involvement and emotional response become concepts that are 'qualified' as important in wilderness making activities. Thus, the 'tests' developed to plan for a transition to wilderness focus not on objectively assessing and managing ecological integrity, but rather on enhancing subjective experience. This view is advanced in the feasibility study report where it is stated that,

The experiential relationship to the wild landscape is essential to the concept of wilderness. Therefore any measure of wilderness must examine the potential of the individual to experience wild or primitive recreation. If we accept this argument, then one of the tests of wilderness is that it can offer opportunities for primitive recreation (Murphy et al., 2011, 6:1).

Consequently, one test developed and applied was an adjusted version of the 'New England model' of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum^{vii} (More et al., 2003), which gauges the user experience of landscape types from 'pavement to primeval' (Interviewee A1) by reference to a series of characteristics likely to be perceived when in a landscape. These characteristics include the: frequency of interaction with other people, apparent level of land management, perceptible degree of human activity, remoteness and size of the area. The application of this test concluded that a significant portion of the Coillte forest is of sufficient scale and remoteness to facilitate a 'primitive' wilderness experience following the re-engineering and removal of trails, the permanent closing of access roads and the ceasing of all commercial forestry operations (Murphy et al., 2011, 6:10).

Associated with and complementing the experience-focus of this test was another test involving the combination of a Landscape Character Assessment inventory (Heritage Council, 2007) and the evaluative guidance provided by national guidelines on the information to be

contained in an environmental impact statement (EPA, 2002). This test proceeded by using a rating scale to score 61 viewpoints in terms of: the level of human intrusion on the skyline (e.g. overhead power lines); the visual impact caused by the presence of non-conforming uses (e.g. wind farms); the degree of impact from human artefacts (e.g. the extent to which a built feature is visible); the landscape value (e.g. aesthetically pleasing, panoramic views); the sense of naturalness (e.g. retention of 'indigenous' character); and the sense of challenge (e.g. rough uneven terrain, requires good navigational skills). These scores were then used to derive a 'wilderness rating' by establishing the ratio between negative and positive 'wild landscape values' that would be expected to be experienced from each of the viewpoints. This test concluded that about one third of the current Coillte lands could be considered 'wild' at present, but that this could be increased to approximately two thirds of the landholding subject to the removal or re-engineering of forest roads and trails, the cessation of commercial forestry and the retention of existing non-planted areas (e.g. peatlands).

Although both these tests employed a set of criteria, they differed fundamentally from those deployed in the *scientific configuration*. Specifically, the *scientific configuration* sought to determine 'facts' relative to an epistemologically objective reality. However, in the case of the *experience configuration*, the attempt to account for what constitutes wilderness is justified by estimating the subjective response of somebody engaging with the landscape. Of note is how ecological issues are given significantly less priority in the *experience configuration*. This was concisely conveyed by an interviewee when reflecting on how to conceive wilderness,

Certainly ecological categories would be the wrong thing to come up (with), because it's not about, in my view, it's not about ecology (Interviewee A2).

This stance reflects how different views of the common good, different 'qualifications', different tests and different lines of justification carried by different orders or worth can generate tensions when seeking to formulate policy and realise its implementation. Specifically, tensions surrounding the place of ecology are thrown starkly into relief through polarised views on the issue of rhododendron. For the *scientific configuration*, the presence and spread of this plant is perceived as a central threat to the common good. However, for those of the *experience configuration*, a much more ambivalent outlook is expressed. As contended by one interviewee,

Habitats are very dynamic. They're constantly changing and this idea of a climax habitat that I would've learned in college, this in an oak forest, that's it, it's all over - rubbish! It's constant change. You might get new species coming in. You might get sycamore coming in. And we had a lot of discussions in the wilderness project about rhododendron. Why do anything with it? Why? Why that particular species? Now I know that there are various reasons, you know, it tends to crowd out. Well we know it crowds out because we are constantly interfering with it. But what happens if we let it go (Interviewee A1).

Hence, in contrast to the *scientific configuration*, in the *experience configuration* the critical capacity to reflect on where the common good lies and how it can be realised is both informed by and rooted in subjective experience. This view foregrounds an 'aesthetics of engagement' (Berleant, 1992) where evidence is supplied via emotional involvement, a sense of challenge and the level of connection one feels with nature. Thus, from this perspective, it is the quest for a wilderness experience that provides the principle of equivalence justifying the Wild Nephin project. It is fitting therefore that those employing an *experience configuration* to reflect on the common good of wilderness were primarily drawn from the outdoor recreation and landscape design professions.

The income configuration: 'market-environmental orders'

Those aligned with the 'income' configuration were drawn mainly from the forestry management and tourism promotion professions. Whilst they espouse both the ecological and experiential benefits of the Wild Nephin project, they nevertheless justify support for the initiative through reference to the poor economic performance of the forest plantation, the monetary value of the various 'public goods' that would accrue from the area's conversion to wilderness (e.g. water quality, carbon storage), and the benefits received from an increase in tourist visitors to the locality. Consequently, concepts such as asset yield, use and option values, as well as investment costs are 'qualified' as pertinent to the legitimisation of arguments.

It is in this context that the feasibility study report 'tests' the profitability of the Coillte forestry planation. This test determines that 'An analysis of yield and net present value demonstrated that harvesting the Nephin forest will result in a negative outcome for the

company' (Murphy et al., 2011, 1:7). This evaluative logic was outlined by one interviewee when noting that,

It's low productivity forest. Parts of it, if they were put up for planting today would be deemed unsuitable for forestry. So a lot of Coillte's role in this, we would see it as this is an area where we could strategically withdraw from forestry, you know, an unsuitable area (Interviewee C1).

A further test applied to the project concept was a monetary valuation of the potential public goods derived from the realisation of the Wild Nephin idea. Resonant with the assessment of investment return on continued commercial forestry on the lands, the logic applied here was that of a cost-benefit analysis. The claimed advantage of this is that,

It allows the benefits of the public good to be adequately weighted alongside costs using the same means of measurement. In this way, environmental goods can be subjected to the same informed decision making as other goods when decisions of resource allocation need to be made (Murphy et al., 2011, 10:4).

Referencing an array of international studies, this test fiscally appraises the value of the Coillte lands based on assumptions of increased visitor numbers. In addition to benefits from carbon sequestration, this appraisal concludes that significant economic benefit would be obtained from the Wild Nephin project, in terms of visits and in terms of tourist revenue. Hence, from this perspective the Wild Nephin project is justified on its potential to supply a revenue stream for the area. This view was conveyed by an interviewee in the context of developing a tourism strategy for County Mayo:

We look[ed] at trends in tourism obviously and where we think the growth areas are, and adventure tourism is coming up strong from the international point of view. It's growing and it's also more valuable than other areas of tourism. People spend more money in it (Interviewee C2).

Hence, differing to both the scientific and experience configurations, in this configuration the critical capacity to identify the common good is informed by an economic valuation of the project's costs and benefits. It is an endeavour to maximise profit that supplies the principle of equivalence validating support for the Wild Nephin project. On the other hand, as noted above, those aligned with the *experience configuration* fear this as a threat to realising the common good they seek to promote. This suggests tensions in views on what the common good is and how it should be realised; an issue that is unpacked in the next section.

The (Un)Common Good of Wilderness

The Wild Nephin project has stalled consequent on a lack of funding, the retirement of motivated advocates and the movement of key personnel to different positions within their respective organisations. Nevertheless, the case provides an insightful illustration of the complexities involved in forging a new nature-based concept within a modified environment. In this sense, the work of Boltanski and Thévenot proves particularly beneficial in furnishing the theoretical tools necessary to tease apart the justifications used to underpin different arguments advanced in supporting the initiative. Indeed, using their framework, the above analysis reveals that while all those involved support the Wild Nephin project, they do so for diverse reasons, with the conceptions of wilderness advanced by some potentially undermining the ideas of others on how to create, manage and engage with a wilderness.

There is no simple template or singular definition available that can easily resolve such differences. Instead, those involved in conceiving the Wild Nephin project must employ their critical capacity to reflect on why it is worth promoting the initiative. It is in this sense that the various configurations of worth emerge as proponents tacitly acknowledge the ‘imperative for justification’ of their views. However, it is also in this sense that deploying the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot throws into relief how the composition of those party to a particular debate give voice to and omit potentially different conceptions of the common good. For example, in the case of the Wild Nephin project, the absence of a configuration resonant with the ‘civic’, ‘opinion’ or ‘domestic’ orders of worth exposes how the potential concerns of adjoining residents or the broader public were rendered mute in the views expressed in the feasibility report and the discourses of those driving the project.

Furthermore, the use of pragmatic sociology to examine the diversity of items qualified, tests used, and arguments deployed in the Wild Nephin case indicates a reflexivity in governance agendas that speak more of ethical frameworks than unreflective instrumentalism (Durnova, 2018). Diverging opinions on the correct manner to conceive a wilderness reflect differences in how the values found in, and attributed to nature profile different policies and management proposals that differentially shape the physicality of ‘natural’ spaces and how we engage with them. Thus, it is possible to conceive the Wild Nephin project as willing to truth (Foucault, 1984, Sheridan, 1980) a concept of wilderness wherein the category of ‘wilderness’ comes into being simultaneous as the forms of reasoning

legitimising it are themselves being formulated. It is in this sense that classifications and classes 'conspire to emerge hand in hand, each egging the other on' (Hacking, 2002, 106).

This prompts the question as to how the contending and ethically profiled categories of wilderness evidenced in this case can be resolved in the politics of planning that govern the management of landscapes? It is conceivable that the diverging 'moral-material ontologies' (Lennon, 2017) held by different stakeholders in the Wild Nephin project may be reconciled through compromise (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) or involve the re-forging of participant viewpoints as they adapt to changing circumstances (Arts et al., 2017). However, it is also possible that the perspective of one configuration becomes institutionalised through the machinery of formal policy, such that it dilutes or even silences notions of the common good held by others. In this sense, it is notable that in December 2017 approximately 4,000 hectares of upland and conifer forest formerly controlled by Coillte were transferred into the management of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and added to the 11,000 hectares of the contiguous Ballycroy National Park. Given the focus of the NPWS on the implementation of EU (e.g. SACs and SPAs^{vii}) and national conservation policy (e.g. NHAs^{vii}), which seek the active management of habitats, including the control of 'invasive species', the institutionalisation of the 'scientific' configuration looks most promising in the Wild Nephin area through becoming embedded within broader hierarchies of nature conservation regulation (Bastmeijer, 2016b, E.C., 2013). Therefore, the ability to align the terms of legitimate reasoning by resonating with existing policy landscapes may ultimately determine the 'nature' of wilderness in Ireland (Fricker, 2007), rather than through discussion and engagement with those who hold alternative viewpoints. Accordingly, an ethical deliberation potentially valuable to the politics of land use planning and management risks being suppressed.

Conclusion

Set against the backdrop of increasing land abandonment (Pereira and Navarro, 2016), the growing demand for wilderness recreation (Hammit et al., 2015), and rising calls for the ecological conservation of large remote areas (Wuerthner et al., 2015), this paper sheds light on the interpretive issues that may arise in seeking to create a wilderness in a modified landscape. This is achieved through attention to how different modes of evaluation are deployed to justify different arguments. In doing so, this paper illustrates the benefits gained

by the application of pragmatic sociology in academic work at the intersection of ethics and environmental policy. In doing so, it explores how different regimes of justification are employed to conceive of something that is already agreed should happen by those involved in the debate. Accordingly, this paper shows the advantages of a nuanced approach that teases apart and analyses how a category of reality is constituted in 'situations' where public disagreement is withheld, but where subtle divergences in the justifications that are advanced nevertheless contour space, place and time. Due to the lack of open debate, such situations frequently fly beneath the radar of policy analysis (Lennon, 2015). Yet in the regularly closed and formalised world of policy development (Cairney, 2011), it is these situations that often profoundly influence how we understand the environment. Thus, to examine how the (un)common good is legitimised in such situations is to unveil how the moral-material realities of our environment are forged.

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ⁱ A deductive-inductive hybrid coding format was employed to analyse this material (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This facilitated balance between the pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot (see below) and a sensitivity to theoretical novelty. Hence, 'thematic codes' informed by the work of Boltanski and Thévenot were deductively utilised concurrent to the inductive openness of 'initial coding'. The inductive coding enabled the examination of 'theoretical possibilities' (Charmaz, 2006, 47) and aided the identification of regular but potentially unanticipated themes in the assembled material. These deductively and inductively derived codes were subsequently employed to inform the comprehensive coding of the material. This detailed phase

of coding refined the thematic and initial codes through the sharpening of existing codes as the coding process advanced through a series of three rounds. Such detailed coding continued until satisfaction was reached that all the material had been meticulously coded. This deductive-inductive strategy thereby ensured that an empirically robust and theoretically incisive understanding of the material was achieved.

ⁱⁱ Referred to as the order of ‘fame’ in 2006 (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) but as the order of ‘opinion’ in an earlier publication (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999) and a subsequent publication by these authors (Thévenot et al., 2000). The term order of ‘opinion’ has been employed here as it is felt that it best reflects the authors’ intentions.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, the logics of the market order can profile how realisation of the common good is best achieved in the context of the environmental order (TEEB, 2010); the scientific expertise characteristic of the industrial order can influence the mode of evaluating environmental aesthetics in the affective justifications of the inspired order (Carlson, 2012); and conversely, the emotional responses underpinning justifications in the inspired order can affect the conception of competent management that grounds legitimised activity in the environmental order (Foster, 2000).

^{iv} It is not sure if the ‘network order’ provides a clearly identifiable test or set of tests. This may be because this order was identified in the context of a broader discussion of the development of capitalism in France in the twentieth century. It is thereby more implicated in a narrative of capitalism’s protean characteristics than in identifying a fundamental philosophical framework focused on the subject’s critical capacity to justify actions and arguments.

^v A working definition of ‘wilderness’ was formulated and supplied in the feasibility report. However, as detailed in the remainder of this paper, when examined against the information obtained from interviews, this lengthy definition seems to represent an uncomfortable ‘compromise’. In this context, it is noted that different chapters of the feasibility report refer to or quote lines from this definition that are most amenable to the chapter’s focus (e.g. Chapter 8: Biodiversity, nature conservation and wilderness). The definition supplied is:

A wilderness is a large, remote, wild (or perceived wild), protected and publicly owned landscape with good visual and natural qualities. A wilderness facilitates humans to experience our connections to the larger community of life through the enjoyment of nature, solitude and challenging primitive recreation, without significant human presence or the intrusion of human structure, artefacts or inappropriate activities while supporting a functioning ecosystem. A wilderness is therefore generally free from human management and manipulation and is an area which allows natural processes take place or where, through a process of rewilding, such natural processes are progressively restored, leading to increased stages of naturalness. A wilderness can include modified landscapes that no longer support long term human occupation and/or a viable managed landscape. A wilderness should be a minimum of 2000ha offering opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

^{vi} SAC is the acronym for Special Area of Conservation, which is a habitat-focused nature conservation area designation under the EU Habitats Directive. SPA is the acronym for Special Protection Area, which is a species-focused nature conservation area designation under the EU Birds Directive. NHA is the acronym for Natural Heritage Area, which is a national designation for the protection of habitats under the Republic of Ireland’s Wildlife Amendment Act.

^{vii} As detailed in chapter 6 of the Feasibility Study Report (Murphy et al., 2011), the New England model was employed rather than the more commonly used and original Recreation Opportunity Spectrum developed by Clark and Stankey (1979). This is because the latter was considered to refer to land holdings that are considerably larger than the Wild Nephin area. In contrast, use of the New England model is justified on its application in the eastern United States where it has been used to evaluate the experience potential of land holdings deemed more commensurate in size and topographical characteristics with those of the Wild Nephin project. Nonetheless, adjustment to this model was required to facilitate the comparatively small landscape scale of the Coillte lands relative to that of North American wilderness areas and level of human modification evident in the Coillte forest, particularly that relating to access roads.