



An arts-led dialogue to elicit shared, plural and cultural values of ecosystems



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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces arts-led dialogue as a critical alternative to the prevailing instrumental and deliberative approaches to environmental valuation and decision-making. The dialogue, directed by an artist in collaboration with a community of participants, can comprise a single event, such as a workshop, or unfold over a period of years. Rather than seeking closure on a pre-determined problem, its intentions are typically to explore a subject or problem in original, challenging or provocative ways, which question the truth claims of any one discipline, at times with unexpected, emancipatory outcomes. We locate arts-led dialogue between deliberative and interpretive approaches to environmental decision-making, and within the history and theory of socially-engaged art, and analyse its key features: its purpose, participation, audience, format, content, and changes in values and identities through transformative learning. We illustrate these features by reporting on a creative enquiry into the shared, plural and cultural values associated with the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland, focusing on the Black Wood of Rannoch in Highland Perthshire. The conclusions highlight two distinctive features: a commitment to critical dialogue and open exchange, and the character and experience of the artist who directs the process.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

There has been significant debate in the literature on ecosystem services valuation and environmental decision-making between two competing axiological and methodological perspectives: first, ‘instrumental’ approaches based on the aggregation of individual preferences using tools such as cost-benefit analysis and, secondly, deliberative valuation procedures that allow values to be formed through communicatively rational debate between participants acting as free and equal citizens (Fish et al., 2011; Kenter et al., 2014a, 2016a, 2016b; O’Neill et al., 2008; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016; Owens et al., 2004; Raymond et al., 2014). This paper outlines elements of a third approach, novel to the ecosystem services field, which addresses limitations of both the instrumental and conventional deliberative approaches. Grounded in the theory and history of socially-engaged art, we refer to it as ‘arts-led dialogue’. Although it is led by artists, it does not necessarily involve the production of art in the traditional sense of a painting or sculpture. Instead, the process of communication with an engaged community of participants becomes the artist’s ‘medium’ and arguably represents the

‘artwork’ itself (although it is unlikely to be referred to as such). By bringing an artist’s aesthetic attention to the historical, cultural and institutional context of a topic or issue, and maintaining a critical distance from established agendas and forms of knowledge, the dialogue can lead to unexpected insights and outcomes, which more conventional approaches might fail to recognize or realize (Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2004, 2011, 2012; Koh, 2015; Thompson, 2012).

We begin the paper with a critique of the model of decision-making that informs both instrumental and deliberative approaches. We argue that a decision is rarely a discrete event, involving the consideration of facts and values as part of a specific deliberative process. Instead, decisions emerge from organizational routines, procedures, habits and norms (O’Neill et al., 2008; Simon, 1997). This realisation redirects our attention away from the production of evidence to support individual decisions, and towards efforts to understand, appraise, and influence historical patterns of decisions and actions, and the institutions through which these are played out. Such a focus is largely missing from the discourse of ecosystem services. It creates a conceptual space to appreciate how an arts-led approach might, intentionally or otherwise, influence environmental decision-making, and offer a necessary corrective to the application of conventional instrumental and delib-

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erative approaches.

In the next section, we outline recent developments in art theory and practice that have resulted in dialogue being regarded as a kind of socially-engaged art. We identify key features that can be used to characterize arts-led dialogue in relation to established deliberative approaches: their purpose, participation, audiences, format and content. In particular, we explore their capacity to form and transform both values and identities referring to the Deliberative Value Formation (DVF) model of Kenter et al. (2016). Section 3 illustrates the approach as practiced by the authors in relation to the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland. We outline the activities, events, conversations and outcomes that have comprised the process to date. In conclusion, we note that the approach is dependent upon the professional experience and character of the artist, who applies his or her aesthetic attention to negotiate its direction, form and creative outputs. Given the unpredictable and, at times, critical nature of the intervention, we highlight the potentially important role of intermediaries, working with a host institution, who understand the role of the artist, and can support the process towards successful outcomes.

1.2. Instrumentality, deliberation and decision-making

The critique of the dominant instrumental approach to ecosystem service valuation and environmental decision-making is now well-rehearsed (Kenter et al., 2016a; Jordan and Russel, 2014; Owens et al., 2004). Grounded in neo-classical economics it follows the logic of cost-benefit analysis by assessing the impacts of alternative options on a range of ecosystem services. These are expressed where possible in monetary terms, and aggregated to identify the option that maximizes welfare (e.g. Braat and de Groot, 2012; Verkerk et al., 2014). As argued elsewhere in this issue, the approach is incompatible with a growing acceptance that values are plural and incommensurable and cannot be aggregated with a single measure. It also assumes that the values of individuals are purely self-interested (Kenter et al., 2014a; Kenter et al., 2016; Hausman, 1993). The approach also struggles to address the unequal distribution of costs and benefits across society (O'Neill et al., 2008). Importantly it also assumes that values are fixed and pre-formed rather than uncovered, created or transformed through dialogue (Irvine et al. 2016; Kenter et al., 2016a). In practice, it is likely that most types of value that are shared across society (e.g. transcendental, social, cultural, communal and contextual) would not be fully captured or understood using this approach (Kenter et al., 2014a).

To overcome these limitations, deliberative methods are increasingly proposed, such as in-depth discussion groups, visioning workshops and citizens' juries (Kenter et al., 2014a; Smith, 2003). In particular, its proponents highlight how preferences (or contextual values) are not pre-formed but generated through deliberation and learning (Christie et al., 2012; Kenter et al., 2014a; Parks and Gowdy, 2012; Spash 2008). This is done by creating opportunities for individuals to express, exchange, reflect, negotiate and develop their views and evidence in response to those of others (Stern and Fineberg, 1996; Kenter et al., 2014a). The outputs might include priority lists, recommendations and verdicts (Kenter et al., 2014a), which reflect the deliberated preferences of the group for a number of options as a means to support decision-making. The approach raises difficult questions around representation, especially of excluded groups, future generations and non-human actors (O'Neill et al., 2008; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016). Given the complementary strengths of the two approaches, various hybrids combine deliberation with formal tools into 'analytical-deliberative' approaches such as multi-criteria analysis (Fish et al., 2011; Kenter, 2016a; Kenter, 2016c; Kenter et al., 2016b; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016; Ranger et al., 2016).

In their ideal forms, the two approaches, instrumental and deliberative, can be seen as a contrast between substantive and procedural forms of rationality, and represent different ethical positions (O'Neill et al., 2008). Instrumental approaches such as cost-benefit analysis are

'consequentialist' (Cooper et al., 2016), grounded in substantive rationality; they assume that "the right decision is the one that produces the best outcome" (e.g. it maximizes well-being). In contrast, deliberative approaches follow a procedural rationality that looks backwards at the process that was followed rather than forwards at the consequences, and assumes that "a good decision is the one that is the outcome of rational deliberation" (O'Neill et al., 2008: 204; Simon, 1979).

Despite this fundamental difference, both approaches share a view of decision-making as consisting of discrete events that can be appraised in relative isolation from their historical and institutional context (O'Neill et al., 2008). In their ideal forms, both follow a similar sequence of steps. For the instrumental approach, as prescribed by the UK Treasury Green Book, options are appraised through economic modeling of costs and benefits (HMT, 2003) while, with deliberation, options are identified, and preferences formed, through the exchange of well-informed and reasoned opinions (Kenter et al., 2016a; Habermas, 1989; Daniels and Walker, 1996; O'Neill et al., 2008). In practice, deliberative methods are seen to be more useful in the early stages when options are developed, while analytic-deliberative and instrumental approaches support the assessment stage where options are appraised (Kenter, 2016a). Attempts to refine this model of decision-making to conform better to reality highlight, for example, the iterations between the steps in the cycle (Fish et al., 2011) rather than addressing institutional structures and procedures, which shape or constrain individual decisions and the use of option appraisal itself (Atkinson, 2015; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, both are conceived as ways to support some form of option appraisal, and hence make recommendations to an individual or group who then arrive at a 'moment of decision'. However, as argued by O'Neill et al. (2008) decisions are rarely discrete events – although retrospectively they might be characterized as such. They emerge from organizational routines, procedures, habits and norms rather than from a specific deliberative process. To understand and appraise decisions we need to understand these procedures and structures of power, and how they shape, and are shaped by, historical patterns of decisions and choices. This view is supported by an alternative, virtues-based approach to decision-making, which, drawing from Aristotle, recognises the inter-relationship between the character of individuals or institutions and the decisions they make (O'Neill et al., 2008).

A separate critique of the 'technical-rational' model of decision-making, grounded in empirical research into knowledge utilization, also challenges the assumption that knowledge flows in a linear fashion to support rational decision-makers, which is then used to improve decisions (Jordan and Russel, 2014; Nutley et al., 2007; Sanderson, 2002; Weiss, 1979). Alternative models include: the conceptual (or enlightenment) model, where a body of knowledge shapes a policy agenda; the strategic model, where knowledge is used tactically by actors in a politicized venue, and the co-production model, where knowledge is constructed through interaction between knowledge users and producers (Jordan and Russel, 2014; Weiss, 1979; Dunlop, 2014). This body of research resonates with the historical and institutional understanding put forward by O'Neill et al. (2008). However, its value lies in helping us to understand, and hence improve, the production and utilization of evidence (e.g. the outputs of instrumental and deliberative approaches to environmental valuation) in its organizational context. The approach of O'Neill et al. suggests we understand and appraise the 'character' of an organization – its structures, procedures, habits and norms – which, in turn, could help reorient historical patterns of decisions and choices into the future.

While both perspectives are clearly important, this wider focus opens up a conceptual space where an arts-led dialogue can play a distinctive role. To help locate arts-led dialogue within the spectrum of approaches to ecosystem valuation, we make a distinction between 'deliberation' and 'dialogue', where – drawing from a range of definitions – deliberation is 'the act of considering the reasons for and

against anything' (i.e. appraising options), and dialogue is defined more broadly as 'an exchange of views in the hope of ultimately reaching agreement' (i.e. working towards a shared understanding). In our critique, we go beyond analytical-deliberation, but also beyond deliberation itself, in cases where deliberative methods are designed and used intentionally as a means to influence decisions conceived as single, isolated events, as part of an idealized policy cycle.

By conceiving ecosystem services valuation in terms of a dialogue that questions, challenges or reimagines the narratives that give meaning to a subject, problem or place, rather than just specific decisions, we identify a particular role for the 'interpretive' methods of the arts and humanities. These are recognized alongside instrumental and deliberative, and include analysis of narratives, music, visual and performance art, and literature including the field of ecocriticism (Buell, 2005; Coates et al., 2014; Kenter, 2016a). We locate arts-led dialogue in the intermediate category identified by Kenter et al. (2016b) as 'interpretive-deliberative', alongside interviews, focus groups, storytelling, and other approaches where dialogue is central to both the elicitation and interpretation of shared, plural and cultural values of ecosystems. Our paper represents one attempt to clarify the intersection between the two approaches.

2. Conceptualising arts-led dialogue

2.1. Dialogue in art theory and practice

Arts-led social and environmental practices have undergone significant developments in the last three decades. Beginning in the early 1980s, Lippard (1983, 1984, 1997, 2014) and Gablik (1984, 1992) began to reveal a new social and environmental context for making art. They shared a critical unease with the art world and outlined theories and practices that integrated art, society and environment. Another early reference can be found in Lacy (1994), who established the idea of 'new genre public art', where artists are directly engaged with their audience in the production of creative work. Joseph Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture' demonstrated the potential for art to transform society, which has become a foundational principle for many practitioners in this field (Kuoni, 1990). Kwon (2002) interrogated practices based on lived experience and relations between people and place. Nicholas Bourriaud began a discourse around 'relational aesthetics' (1998), based upon his recognition of an emergent museum-based form of social interaction (Bourriaud, 1998). More recently, Claire Bishop (2012) wrote on 'participatory art' defending aesthetics from ethical incursion, and Nato Thompson (2012) produced an international overview of activist and performative projects, which he terms 'socially engaged art'.

Helen and Newton Harrison's art practice includes the production of metaphor and mapping of ecosystems, hydrology and cultural relationships, and has involved a deep reading of social, political and economic conditions in relation to regional, national and international catchment basins. In the 1990s they focused on the coastal redwood forests of the Pacific Northwest (Harrison et al., 1993, 1995, 2001). Immersed in the issue of old growth forestry, they argued that 'The Forest is Dying', and introduced the idea of an ecosystem security system based upon one percent of gross US national profit. In doing so, they integrated aesthetics, ecology and economics in a metaphoric narrative of sustainability. Koh (2015) has developed an open-ended collaborative approach over two decades, working with marginalized land communities in South East Asia as well as in Europe and Ireland. Subsequently, historians, critics and curators have struggled with newer social and discursive forms, including Kester (2004, 2011, 2012), who developed the idea of 'dialogical aesthetics' based on generative discursive interaction, and Helguera (2011), an art practitioner and educator who has helped to interpret socially-engaged art for a wider audience.

What these initiatives have in common, which is of relevance to

deliberative approaches, is a notion of art as social interaction. The artwork is not necessarily a finished 'product' as traditionally understood. Instead, a dialogue, facilitated by an artist, in collaboration with a community of participants, becomes the artwork itself, or a central component of it. The process of conversation becomes the artist's medium, and the condition and character of the exchange are among the criteria through which it is critically appraised (Kester, 2012; Helguera, 2011). The dialogue is unlikely to be conducted for its own sake, but for a range of reasons, typically to explore a subject or problem in creative or challenging ways with a view to reach some kind of agreement, or to build the capacity of the group of participants. Its format might include a workshop, a provocative political act, or collaboration in the production or interpretation of a tangible artwork. It might be bounded by a discrete event, or be seen to unfold over a number of years. Its various forms have been described under many titles, as 'community', 'collaborative', 'participatory', 'dialogic' and 'public' art, and more recently as 'social practice' or 'socially-engaged art' (Helguera, 2011: 2–3). Formally, it is a kind of conceptual process art (Helguera, 2011) or a performative, process-based approach (Kester, 2012). We introduce the general term 'arts-led dialogue' to identify our interpretation of the genre as outlined theoretically in this section. Our specific application of arts-led dialogue, outlined in Section 3, puts greater emphasis on human-nature relations, and has been described elsewhere as a form of 'creative enquiry' (Collins et al., 2014).

Unlike much contemporary art theory, influenced strongly by postmodernism, the theoretical tradition supporting socially-engaged art draws from philosophical pragmatism, neo-pragmatism and education theory, including John Dewey, Jurgen Habermas and Paulo Freire (Helguera, 2011). In Kester's analytic framework, the function of art is to create "a space in which certain questions can be asked, certain critical analysis articulated, that would not be accepted or tolerated elsewhere" (Kester, 2004: 68). It is an "active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict" (ibid: 8). Notably, the question of beauty is set aside in Kester's theory; its relationship to aesthetics has long been contested (Beardsley, 1966; Cooper et al., 2016), and it does not necessarily add to the interpretation or judgement of the approaches discussed here, where different criteria apply, as discussed below.

To explore further how an arts-led dialogue can be positioned in relation to established deliberative approaches, and other kinds of social or community intervention, we analyse its: 1) purpose and goals; 2) representation and audience; 3) format and content, and 4) the processes involved. These categories were selected to reflect: focal points for critical analysis of dialogical aesthetics identified by Kester (2011); the norms of deliberation and the factors that shape its value outcomes (Kenter et al., 2016a; O'Neill et al., 2008), and generic factors faced when designing stakeholder engagement processes (Fish, 2011; Reed, 2008).

2.2. Purpose and goals

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the goals of arts-led dialogue and socially-engaged art differ widely between artists, projects, participants and contexts. Nevertheless, two common goals emerge: first, some form of conceptual impact, by raising awareness or debating an issue, subject or problem, in a critical self-reflexive way with an engaged community, to advance understanding and hopefully reach agreement; and secondly, some form of capacity- or community-building (Helguera, 2011; Koh, 2015). While such goals might seem commonplace, the specific intentions are often radical. The critical pedagogy of Freire is frequently cited, which sees learning as a process of consciousness-raising by a community through collective reflection on their circumstances, with potentially emancipatory outcomes (Freire, 1970; Helguera, 2011; Reed et al., 2010). By willingly engaging in an arts-led dialogue, writes

Helguera (2011: 13), participants can “extract enough critical and experiential wealth to walk away feeling enriched, perhaps even claiming some ownership of the experience or ability to reproduce it with others”. In this sense arts-led dialogue resonates with social theories of learning, such as transformative learning (Mezirow, 1995, 2000; Reed et al., 2010). According to Kester (2012: 153) “these exchanges can catalyse surprisingly powerful transformations in the consciousness of their participants”.

As with established deliberative approaches, when a group is divided in its interests and holds a plurality of values and identities, consensus might not be desirable or realistic, and the best outcome might be a shared respect for reasonable differences, or a degree of cooperation in the face of considerable disagreement (Lo, 2011; Dryzek, 2000; Kenter et al., 2014a; Sagoff, 1998). Thus, an arts-led dialogue that seeks emancipatory goals can be expected to succeed with a relatively homogenous group of individuals that can be mobilised by placing them in tension with an external group or institution, such as the state or market (cf. Kester, 2011). In doing so, their understandings, values and identities may become aligned as they reach agreement on their shared relationship to the external world, a realisation that helps build capacity. This consensus could represent the end of the artist's intervention, after which their work is done. Alternatively, it could represent the end of the first stage in the generic process of deliberation outlined by Kenter et al. (2016a). If so, the process would then continue by identifying and selecting between alternative actions (which itself might not necessarily lead to consensus). While these latter steps could also become part of the arts-led dialogue, it is unlikely that the process would have been conceived as such from the beginning.

A capacity-building or emancipatory goal does not necessarily mean that the artist is pursuing a pre-defined agenda, such as finding a solution to a problem. Even with explicitly political actions, their purpose may still be focused on capacity-building, by facilitating the creation of enduring networks and shared identities that last beyond the action itself (Helguera, 2011). Koh (2015), an artist who allows the purpose of the work to unfold as part of the process itself, claims that he has no pre-determined objective or agenda – specifically one derived from expert assessment and social analysis – and suggests the process puts himself (along with everyone involved) in flux. He writes: “I seek to provide the know-how to increase the capacity for agency. I do not make any demand that participants should perform or undertake any prescribed action. Every decision regarding their actions rests on the participants” (Koh, 2015).

An arts-led dialogue does not set out to follow the logical steps in an idealized policy cycle. If it did so, it might be constrained by the search for problems that can be resolved easily, using measures that are both technically and politically feasible. In contrast, the artist, typically working as a (relatively) free agent, whose critical audience lies in the art world rather than applied social science, can sustain a position of strategic disinterest in utilitarian considerations. In doing so, the dialogue might reveal and express uncomfortable truths, and intractable problems, where the solutions, if they exist, reside outside established structures, procedures, habits and norms. Disinterest is a means to set aside the practicalities of an issue and focus on the ‘evolution of subjectivity’ (or meaning or significance) for its own sake. This is not to suggest that, once the arts-led dialogue begins, agendas do not emerge, but rather that those agendas are revealed through discourse, and in response to extant knowledge, experience and meaning.

2.3. Participation and audience

People engage with the process directly as participants or indirectly as audiences, i.e. members of relevant communities of place and interest across society, including the critical art world. First, regarding the participants, the need to involve representatives of all relevant

stakeholder groups and a diversity of voices in participatory processes, including arts-led dialogue, has long been acknowledged (Fish, 2011). Inclusiveness is typically seen to increase the quality and legitimacy of the process, and its outputs and outcomes, while inclusiveness itself can be valued for its own sake (Chilvers, 2009). When properly facilitated, it can enhance the degree of social learning and sharing of values (Kenter et al., 2014a; Cuppen, 2012; Newig and Fritsch, 2009), supporting capacity-building goals. The ecosystem services agenda is committed to capturing the full range of benefits for human well-being, including ‘cultural services’, which underlines the need to reach out to new stakeholder groups who can speak for them (Fish, 2011). While ecosystem services approaches now routinely claim to extend the boundaries of engaged stakeholders (albeit, at times, superficially), guided by the ideals of representativeness and neutrality, in principle this is not necessarily the case for an arts-led dialogue, where artists may choose to work with a narrowly-defined community, or conversely bring in new voices with challenging or inspiring ideas even if this appears to over-represent certain interests. Clearly, decisions around ‘who's in and why’ (Reed et al., 2009) are fundamental to the process and outcomes of both arts-led dialogue and deliberative processes. But arguably artists, with their non-instrumental, critical, and creative intentions, can choose to be less constrained by the norms of procedural rationality.

Secondly, regarding the audience, the genre of socially-engaged art tends to be inclusive and accessible to the wider public. This contrasts with other contemporary art, where social interactions are structured around exclusionary codes or ‘passwords’ that fulfil a descriptive role within art discourse, but also confer status on those ‘in the know’, perhaps allowing them to maintain a distance from the mainstream (Helguera, 2011). A key part of the audience is likely to be the critical art world, which judges its impact in two ways: as a social intervention and as a symbolic action. In principle, the same intervention seeking conceptual or capacity-building outcomes could be framed within the realm of art, adult education, or community development, but judged differently according to the criteria of its respective critical audience. The interest of the art world is perhaps the clearest indicator that a project is ‘art’, helping to fund the work, promote it, and shape its format and content by means of its evaluative criteria, and influencing the choice of venue and media through which it is practiced and reported (Helguera, 2011).

2.4. Format and content

In addition to the question of ‘who's in and why’, the deliberation literature devotes much attention to the facilitation process, highlighting the need to be impartial and independent to ensure all voices are heard, despite possible inequalities of power. This affects the extent to which participants' values will converge or diverge (Kenter et al., 2014a), influencing the outcomes, including whether any consensus is genuine or ‘dysfunctional’ (Kenter et al., 2016a; Orchard-Webb et al., 2016a; Reed, 2008).

In addition to the relations between participants, a second dimension to power lies between the participants as a group, and the actors controlling the process. According to Helguera (2011: 54): “the expertise of the artist lies, like Freire's, in being a non-expert, a provider of frameworks on which experiences can form and sometimes be directed and channelled to generate new insights around a particular issue”. Similarly, for Kester (2012: 153), citing the British artist Peter Dunn, the artist is ‘context provider’ rather than a ‘content provider’. Within this discursive space, artists can work on behalf of the community to solve their problems and further their interests, in the manner of a community development worker, or they can seek to impose their own vision or agenda. In both cases they may have lost sight of a commitment to open exchange and critical dialogue, which, if practiced, could allow all parties to identify common interests and negotiate a way forward (cf. Helguera, 2011). Either position could be a

point of departure, but rather than subscribing to them uncritically, the artist might “make work that ironizes, problematizes, and even enhances tensions around those subjects, in order to provoke reflection” (Helguera, 2011: 35).

In arts projects that do maintain a critical distance from the interests from any one group, the tactics used and the atmosphere created can vary on a continuum from agreement to antagonism, or collaboration to confrontation. One way to understand the dynamics is by looking at how topics or problems are taken beyond their established disciplinary boundaries and institutional settings into an ambiguous and uncertain space. In Kester’s account: “Knowledge is reliable, safe, and certain as long as it is held in mono-logical isolation and synchronic arrest. As soon as it becomes mobilised and communicable, this certainty slips away and truth is negotiated in the gap between self and other, through an unfolding, dialogical exchange” (Kester, 2011: 19). Likewise, Helguera writes: “It is this temporary snatching away of subjects into the realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines” (Helguera, 2011: 5). Jay Koh’s approach recognises the validity and dynamism of opposing values and beliefs, which require a rebalancing of power to achieve the coevolution of meaning. He develops spaces where everyone can articulate their own position and test it through “participatory, critical and creative thinking”. This format allows his participants “to emphasize, accept and support each other’s agency and self-realisation” (Koh, 2015: 162). In doing so, Koh appears to embrace the norms of communicative rationality theorised by Habermas (1992), but the purpose is more open-ended than an instrumental focus on decision-making.

2.5. Processes of transformation

Changes in understanding, re-evaluating positions, uncovering latent values, generating new values, and changes in identity, in a social context, are all explored by social theories of learning. Mezirow (1995) introduced a typology comprising ‘instrumental learning’ (acquiring new knowledge or skills), ‘communicative learning’ (understanding and reinterpreting knowledge through communication with others), and ‘transformative learning’ (where an examination of underlying assumptions leads to change in attitudes, behaviour and social norms) (Reed et al., 2010). Arguably, communicative learning maps onto both deliberative and arts-led approaches, but arts-led approaches in particular seek to encourage transformative learning. The deliberative valuation literature highlights examples of transformative learning in relation to the environment, but the focus is on changes in values rather than identities. Where identities come to the fore they are primarily considered in terms of how they shape values. Thus, questions of identity arise in the story-telling deliberations in Kenter et al. (2016b) and the ethnographic video interviews used to inform deliberations in Ranger et al. (2016). In contrast, Kester (2004) presents the identity construction role of dialogue as a key component of his dialogical aesthetics through what he calls ‘empathetic insight’.

Much of the theory around deliberative democracy, social learning and socially-engaged art is grounded in Habermas’ theory of communicative action, a discursive form of communication in what he called the ‘public sphere’, a space in which “no force except that of the better argument is exercised” (Habermas, 1975: 108). Kester builds on established criticisms of Habermas, noting that, in practice, we do not necessarily respond to reason. He borrows the term ‘connected knowing’ from Belenky et al. (1986): “a form of knowledge based not on counterpoised arguments, but on a conversational mode in which each interlocutor works to identify with the perspective of the others” (Kester, 2004: 113). His account reads like a plausible characterisation of a social encounter within the safe discursive space created by many arts-led projects. Connected knowing recognises that, in practice, dialogue takes place in a wider social context, rather than a rational public sphere where interests and inequalities of power are set aside. In

this arena, Kester explains, dialogue becomes a form of empathetic identification: “It is through empathy that we can learn not simply to suppress self-interest through identification with some putatively universal perspective, or through the irresistible compulsion of logical argument, but to literally re-define self: to both know and feel our connectedness with others” (Kester, 2004: 114).

By highlighting the role of empathy, Kester puts his finger on a process that has value in and of itself. Furthermore, a project that lets us ‘both know and feel our connectedness with others’ is looking likely to support its capacity-building and possibly emancipatory goals. Empathy, and the process of listening, underline the character of much socially-engaged art, which creates a space for identification, for listening and honest speaking and, referring to the work of Suzanne Lacy, for people to “begin to identify with each other as individuals rather than abstractions” (Kester, 2004: 116). While empathetic identification, and the insights it generates, might also result from the use of established deliberative approaches, it is not their purpose, and is unlikely to be given as much critical attention or encouragement. Kester (2004) notes three ‘axes’ along which empathetic insight can be produced (reflecting those identified in the discussion above): between artists and their collaborators; among the collaborators themselves; and between the collaborators and other communities of viewers. As noted later, it could also be produced along a fourth axis: identification between collaborators and the places (or ‘environmental settings’) that they value (Goto Collins and Collins, 2012; Goto Collins and Collins, 2016; Church et al., 2014; Fish et al., 2016).

The Deliberative Value Formation (DVF) model, developed by Kenter et al. (2016a), identifies nine outcomes of group deliberative valuation, which helps us further to conceptualise arts-led dialogue. These are: 1) changes in systemic understanding; 2) changes in capacity to deliberate; 3) changes in trust; 4) improved understanding of the values of others; 5) triggering of dormant values; 6) stronger association of contextual values with transcendental values; 7) a shift in value orientation towards the common good; 8) adaptation and social desirability bias, and 9) entrenchment. While in principle all nine of these could emerge from an arts-led dialogue, the seventh kind, ‘a shift in value orientation towards the common good’, most closely fits the empathetic insight highlighted by Kester (2004), the potential for emancipation (Helguera, 2011) and the self-realisation and capacity for agency reported by Koh (2015). Kenter et al. (2014a) describe how this outcome can increase willingness to sacrifice personal interests – similar to the shift from ‘consumer’ to ‘citizen’ values theorised by Sagoff (1998) – and acknowledge that this might only reflect a ‘temporary suppression of self-interest’. Perhaps this is not a problem if the next step is to insert the elicited values into decision-making. But if the goal is more open-ended, we suggest that an arts-led dialogue unfolding over a period of time, which sees the ‘condition and character of the dialogical exchange itself’ (Kester, 2012: 157) as a focus of disinterested aesthetic attention, creates space to generate an enduring sense of shared values and identities, at times with unanticipated consequences.

3. Seeking value in the Caledonian pinewoods

3.1. Overview

Between 2013 and 2016, the environmental artists Collins and Goto led a project to explore the Caledonian pinewoods of Scotland as both an ecological and cultural entity. They came to focus on the Black Wood of Rannoch in Perthshire, one of the largest remnants of the forested landscape that once extended across much of Scotland (Smout, 2000). Since 1974, the primary objective of management has been biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration, with a core area designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (FCS, 2009). The artists collaborated with a social scientist from Forest Research (the research agency of the Forestry

Commission) and partners from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), the Landscape Research Group, the Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust (PKCT), academics from the arts and humanities, and local artists, community leaders and residents in the village of Kinloch Rannoch (Collins et al., 2014; Edwards et al., 2016; Kenter et al., 2014b).

The process began with informal conversations and walk-and-talk events in the forest, and a two-day 'future forest' workshop held locally in November 2013. This was followed by artists' residencies in early 2014 at the Perth Museum and Art Gallery, and at Forest Research, where conversations and reviews were conducted on woodland ecology and history, landscape restoration, environmental aesthetics, and the ecosystem services literature. The artists produced a number of conceptual artworks based on their experiences in the forest, including a large map of the Rannoch region showing translations of Gaelic place names, which were shown as part of an exhibition 'Sylva Caledonia', convened by 'ecoartscotland' and held at the Summerhall Gallery, Edinburgh, in Spring 2015. The exhibition was accompanied by a public seminar series 'The Caledonian Everyday' with the authors and some project partners among the speakers, which continued the dialogue with local ecologists and forest managers, assisted by discussions around the artists' exhibits and publications.

Taken together, this evolving sequence of events, activities, artworks, publications, blogs, conversations and deliberations formed the entirety of the arts-led dialogue, referred to by the artists as a 'creative enquiry' or more specifically a 'critical forest art practice'. While we focus on dialogue as its main component, and contrast it with established deliberative approaches, it could also be described as a mixed methods approach, with the artists providing coherence and direction to a series of separate actions. For example, the workshop concluded with a group deliberation to confer, ponder and make recommendations, which resembled a deliberative in-depth workshop or visioning exercise (Kenter, 2016a). Later, an indicative scenario analysis was carried out to explore options for management of Caledonian forests as a heuristic device to support the on-going dialogue (Edwards et al., 2016). In the next section, rather than attempting to evaluate the entire process, which at this stage would be difficult and premature, we focus on the workshop to illustrate how the conceptual points made in the previous section can play out in practice.

3.2. The process: the 'cultural problem' and 'future forest' workshop

At an early stage in the process, initial plans developed with PKCT to revive historical trails through the Rannoch region that once facilitated the transhumance (the seasonal migration of people and cattle) were blocked by the government agencies, FCS and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), responsible for managing the forest. Given the agencies' objectives for the site, this decision was understandable. The Black Wood of Rannoch management plan limits facilitation of any public activity and engagement that does not directly serve the conservation interest (FCS, 2009). However, during a guided walk in the forest, it became clear that some members of the Rannoch community, as well as the core trail interests, sought to renew their engagement and access to the forest in culturally meaningful ways. This encounter revealed tensions and misunderstandings between agencies and locals, and the artists themselves, related to the policy of biodiversity conservation, and its restricted range of human interest. The artists were left wondering why it appeared that the social and cultural values of the Black Wood were viewed as an antithesis to the precepts of scientific conservation. The tensions had two manifestations: first, discouragement of public access, and secondly the need for retrieval, recognition and expression of the cultural and historical meanings associated with the site and the Caledonian forest more generally.

The tensions were broadly understood to be a local manifestation of

a much wider problem – in our analysis, a set of structural and discursive relations between land management institutions, the scientific discourse of biodiversity conservation with its commitment to the ideal of 'naturalness', and the perceptions of a largely urbanized public about the character, meaning and purpose of the rural landscape. Importantly, this agenda was co-produced through dialogue between the artists, local residents and forest managers. It was not part of a predetermined activist strategy, but a moment in the early stages of the process when, in our analysis, uncomfortable, static, mono-disciplinary truths that are institutionalized and seldom-questioned were put into the light of day, revealing tensions and misunderstandings, but also opportunities, which called for attention.

The purpose of the workshop was to recover lost cultural values, create new meanings and imagine alternative futures for the Black Wood. There were 28 active participants: 11 community members (including board members of local associations, land managers, artists and residents with Gaelic language, landscape and ecological interests); five members of the forestry sector (public and private); four members of NGOs; three representatives of the Scottish cultural sector; three arts and humanities academics, and the artists Collins and Goto. An additional 20 people attended a public seminar and forest walk organized as part of the event. The cultural sector was deliberately well-represented, with participants invited to address different perspectives on the 'cultural problem' that had emerged in the early stages of the project. Again, representation was not predetermined: had a different issue emerged, participation at a workshop might have been extended in other ways, to represent other social groups, agencies or disciplines. Having said that, the need to broaden participation and incorporate cultural and spiritual values into native pinewood management was already acknowledged (Mason et al., 2004).

Regarding the audience, the artists were influenced as much by the evaluative criteria of the ecosystem services community as that of the art world, for example with dialogue, presentations and a contribution to a publication linked to the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (Kenter et al., 2014b). Primarily, they felt responsibility towards the communities that care for, and care about, the Black Wood, as well as towards the forest itself. There was an underlying 'more than human' dimension to the artists' creative enquiry, which sought to encourage empathetic identification between participants, but also with the Black Wood, through careful aesthetic attention.

Regarding the format, the event was convened by a professional facilitator with personal links to the community, who sought to maintain neutrality and give voice to all participants. More importantly, in designing the event, the artists did not act as 'neutral' facilitators who simply provided a framework for conflicting local parties to reach agreement. Nor did they act as uncritical agents of the specific community interests who wanted to change how the forest is managed and used. They also did not seek to impose their emerging perspective, grounded in a sense of lost layers of history in the landscape. Working back and forth between these positions, they applied their 'expertise of the non-expert' and an attitude of strategic disinterest to re-frame local tensions within a wider historical and cultural context of interaction between people and the forest. The artists were aware that the core designated area of the Black Wood was unusually restrictive in terms of public access. But this allowed them to present the project as a symbolic action: one that encourages us to notice the same issues in sites where they are less apparent, and hence locate the problem more generally across the Scottish land management community and wider society.

Regarding the content, through a series of presentations, the participants were introduced to a range of ideas, opinions and proposals, expressing diverse contextual values in relation to the forest, which, in various ways, were informing, inspiring and challenging (Collins et al., 2014; Collins and Goto, 2016). Two breakout groups were asked to proceed from initial scoping of what mattered to them about the Black Wood, through more detailed consideration of

problems and opportunities, and visions of the future forest that could be shared by most participants. Each group was given a series of maps and an overview of the strategic management objectives for the forest. The key issues, and proposed actions and options were recorded (see below).

The workshop established the agenda for the subsequent conversations, events and outputs over the following two years. Reflecting back on this period, the process was rarely conceived by the artists in terms of the kinds of generic goals identified for arts-led dialogue in Section 2. Instead, their preoccupation was with the forest itself and our changing relationship with it. The overriding question that lay behind and gave coherence and direction to the dialogue was one of environmental ethics: ‘What is right for the Black Wood?’ This question was not posed in response to a sense that nature, as opposed to culture, has intrinsic value; rather it was prompted by the narratives, old and new, that people use to express the value of the forest, i.e. the idea that the Black Wood is the product of centuries of human interaction, a history that is largely lost. Following O’Neill et al. (2008) the question could be reframed as: what was the best way to continue the ‘story’ of the Black Wood in such a way as to secure the transfer of historical significance into the future?

3.3. The outcomes: from biodiversity conservation to ecocultural restoration

During the workshop, it was striking how ecological, and aesthetic and spiritual, values were closely aligned. It was not possible to separate out different groups of participants according to these shared cultural, contextual values. Some of the most passionate expressions of the aesthetic and spiritual value of the forest came from the local FCS manager (an ecologist), who described it as the “beating heart” of the district, “a jewel to be nurtured” and “a national icon.” He spoke of the 300 year old ‘granny pines’ as “the fantastic matriarchs of the forest, something to respect, to be treated honourably” and as “things of great beauty” (Collins et al., 2014; Edwards et al., 2016). Other local foresters suggested that they see their role as (at times, misunderstood) guardians of the natural features that give the wood these values. They indicated that they personally valued the wood as much, if not more, for its cultural importance as its ecological importance. This challenged preconceptions about the ways in which the foresters’ sense of aesthetic value might be conditioned by their institutional role as resource managers (cf. Peterken, 1996; Edwards et al., 2012).

A significant cluster of values, again shared across a range of participants, which saw the forest as something we are connected to, identify with, have a relationship with, and perhaps even empathize with. One participant valued the opportunity “to walk through it, and walk its history at the same time”; another valued the chance “to wander with the Black Wood rather than through it”. Another asked: “Does beauty draw out greater attention, knowledge and care?” One local artist wrote: “I will continue to work on the Black Wood, with the Black Wood and in the Black Wood!” Regarding ecological value, again there was strong agreement shared across a range of participants. One said: “Remember the ecological community – not just the iconic trees”. Another exclaimed: “Can you imagine Rannoch in one hundred years... with both sides of the Loch covered in Caledonian pine!” Similarly, another said: “I want to see lynx and boar and wolves in my Scottish forest. It has got to be bigger and wilder and more magnificent than it is today.” Participants were pleased to see agreement on the need to conserve and expand the forest: “The general consensus that the Black Wood is special and needs to be both conserved and expanded is inspiring.”

Regarding access, however, there were tensions around the perception that people were not being encouraged to visit the forest, and a proposal to produce maps and leaflets to build visitors’ confidence. Earlier, during the guided walk, the same local manager explained: “The Forestry Commission are not opposed to the public coming in

here, but they are very concerned about making it more popular... The forest is more important than the people.” During the workshop the issue was not explicitly addressed, but some local participants implicitly questioned the policy: “Who owns it anyway?” “Do we ‘protect and save’ or ‘protect and share?’” “People have always been and will always be a part of the Black Wood.” Closely related to the issue of access, some local residents wished for greater community engagement. This was not expressed in an oppositional way, and in some cases as a sense of duty: wanting to give as well as gain from the forest: “What can the community give the Black Wood? What can the community gain from the Black Wood?” Participants recognized their values as relational, or two-way, as discussed by Cooper et al. (2016).

Regarding cultural and historical values, the picture was more complex and overlapped with the issue of community engagement. There were calls: to create a “deeper understanding” and “develop relationship”; to “remember the narratives of this place” including the Rannoch School, which was located within the forest but is now closed; to increase “community involvement in learning what was known in the past; “capture local stories, before it’s too late; to use the Black Wood as a “show piece” providing “information and education opportunities at the centre in town; to offer more “on-site walk and talks in the wood with diverse experts; to “use the scientific infrastructure [in the forest] as a learning resource” and “stimulate cultural engagement”.

However, regarding the broader cultural and ecological history, most participants were less knowledgeable. Some shared their feelings of ignorance, with one asking: “Does anyone know why it’s called ‘Black’ Wood?” There was a discussion about the loss of Gaelic language resulting from forced depopulation during the Highland clearances, and historical education policy, over the last two centuries, embodied for example in place names, and how this represented a loss in aesthetic value. Through the dialogue, some participants increased their understanding and appreciation of the forest and wider landscape as an embodiment of the contested cultural history of the region, and saw the policy of biodiversity conservation in the different light: while it had ensured its continued survival in the face of destructive economic interests, the restriction of human activity in pursuit of a wilderness ideal of naturalness had frozen the story of human interaction with the forest, and represented yet another layer of lost cultural meaning. Questions were aired, but not resolved, about the links between forest management and the future aesthetic form of the ‘granny pines’, which has been shaped by centuries of human interaction (Peterken and Stace, 1986; Steven and Carlisle, 1959).

Four strong proposals emerged from the workshop, which saw ways to overcome both aspects of the ‘cultural problem’ as originally encountered. These were: 1) ‘deep mapping’ to create a multi-layered, ecological and cultural map using GPS, texts and images that celebrates the Black Wood; 2) an inclusive forest planning process with local agencies and residents; 3) a ‘Caledonian Forest Way’, linking specific areas, forests and communities through a trail defined by arts, culture and Gaelic themes, and 4) an interdisciplinary residency programme to help establish new social and cultural relationships with the Black Wood (Collins et al., 2014). Together these proposals represent a shift in focus: from ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation, a policy that derives authority from scientific discourse, towards a new paradigm of ecological and cultural restoration, which recognises the legitimacy of shared, plural and cultural values, and negotiation between alternative narratives of the appropriate story of place. While there is no certainty that these proposals will be enacted, if they were, ironically, the outcome in terms of physical management of the forest may change little, if at all. However, there could be a substantial change in the relationship between people and forest, and between forest managers, locals and visitors (which in turn might increase support for conservation).

Going into the workshop there was a feeling of distrust between some participants, but, by the end, this had largely dissipated. What mattered most, it appeared, were local everyday appreciations of the

forest for its aesthetic, spiritual, ecological value, and the memories it embodied. By the end, there was a sense in which seeing and knowing the forest through ecological science, aesthetic attention, and history, narrative and memory, were complementary ways of expressing value for the same phenomenon, but different in terms of their discursive power to influence decision-making. One wrote: “The value of the cultural complement to scientific conservation is clearer at the end of the day.”

Revisiting the DVF model (Kenter et al., 2016a) introduced in Section 2.5, we noticed changes in systemic understanding, changes in trust, improved understanding of the values of others, and a shift in value orientation towards the common good. With the changes in values, there were also changes in identities and connectedness. Instead of participants being seen as discrete groups of foresters, locals, and outsiders from the cultural sector, there was a new sense of a diverse group working with a broad narrative of regional ecocultural restoration (cf. Higgs, 2003). This narrative was not fully formed (perhaps making it easier for participants to give it their support), but, for some, it represented an inspiring and inclusive alternative to business-as-usual. A sense of increased identification and connectedness with the forest itself was also apparent during and after the guided walks associated with the workshop, evidenced in part by narratives of being ‘with’ as well as ‘in’ the forest. The convergence of values and identities, along with increased connectedness between participants (and arguably with the forest itself), represented the beginnings of capacity-building for future cooperation: the proposal for deep mapping of the forest was being considered by local agencies. There were also unplanned instrumental impacts through decisions to conduct surveys in ways that engaged with locals. However, the main outcome of the workshop was more conceptual and durational: it helped to inform and reorient the dialogue, including the public seminars, conceptual artworks, ad hoc discussions, and funding proposals that seek to revive the national debate about the Caledonian pinewoods, their history, their value and their future.

These outcomes are unlikely to have been realized through a technical-rational process that sought to elicit existing values for insertion into decision-making. Furthermore, we suggest that a ‘neutral’ deliberative process, led by ‘impartial’ social scientists or economists, might not have extended the sphere of influence in a particular direction, i.e. towards cultural interests, or questioned the attitudes and values that underpin current policy. While some deliberative-interpretive methods, such as an in-depth workshop, might have realized the same outcomes, the difference lies with the creative freedom and longer-term intentions of the artists, who provide their own coherence and character to the unfolding dialogue, leading to an imaginative range of outcomes.

4. Conclusions

Behind this paper lies the question: as researchers wishing to work towards a resilient and sustainable future, how do we make a difference? Do we support better decision-making by improving the quality of evidence and knowledge exchange, perhaps by using a co-production model of engagement? Or do we pursue an alternative approach, grounded in a different rationality and ethical position, which also pays critical attention to the context and character of the organizations that make those decisions – their institutional structures, procedures, habits and norms. Between these alternatives lies a spectrum of possible interventions, helping us to position the roles available for arts-led dialogue as conceived in this paper.

Comparing arts-led dialogue to deliberative approaches, we highlight two key differences. The first lies in the process: its intentions and methods. The artists are unlikely to impose their own agenda on the participants, or that of an external institution for example by conceiving the action as the early stage in an idealized policy cycle, which eventually seeks to provide evidence to support decision-making within

existing institutional structures and procedures. They are also unlikely to act as ‘neutral’ facilitators that help a divided community reach consensus, which would resemble a kind of community development project, or provide uncritical support to help a group solve their problems. Instead, the artist is committed to a critical dialogue that might use any of these positions as a point of departure, but then work with it creatively, at times maintaining a critical distance, to help participants and the artists themselves realize new understandings or insights, agreement, empathy and connectedness. In doing so, they might reach a common understanding and build capacity with potentially emancipatory outcomes, which in turn could generate unintended changes to structures and procedures, and patterns of decision-making into the future. Through this approach, the arts and humanities can offer critical attention to the ethics and character of organized interests that seeks new meanings rather than evidence to support decisions, or neutral facilitation to reach some consensual decision point. By changing meanings and relationships, an arts-led approach has the potential to change structures and procedures, challenging extant patterns of decision-making.

The second difference resides in the artists themselves. In principle, a similar process could be led by a community or organization development consultant, adopting similar values and approaches along the lines of Freire’s critical pedagogy (1970), Mezirow’s transformative learning (2000) Schön’s reflective practice and other methods building on the tradition of action research (e.g. Heron, 1996; McNiff, 2013; Schön, 1983). But artists have particular kinds of education, networks, skills and experience: their background in the history and theory, and personal experience, of socially-engaged art, brings an interdisciplinary ‘expertise of the non-expert’, a critical stance in relation to the truth claims and standards of any one discipline, and an aesthetic attention to the dialogical exchange (Kester, 2012). Their relative freedom from institutional constraints allows them to pursue non-instrumental goals shaped by the evaluative criteria of the critical arts world, such as originality, creativity and provocativeness. All of this combines to reinforce a commitment to certain values, ideals and norms, both personally and professionally, such as social engagement, authenticity of expression, self-actualization and the ‘evolution of subjectivity’. Such qualities may contrast with the procedures and norms of administrative decision-making (Simon, 1997). This tension is partly the source of the artist’s creative contribution, but it can also be perceived as a problem by those seeking to operationalize arts-led initiatives within a formal organizational setting. Here, we identify the potential benefits of an intermediary, working within (or with) the host institution, such as an arts manager, knowledge exchange professional or interdisciplinary researcher, who can understand what an artist can offer, prepare a brief to attract the right kind of artist, and, if appropriate, support the process through periods of uncertainty and change towards constructive and rewarding outcomes.

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