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Landscapes of the Mind

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What comes to mind when you think of landscape? Do you imagine sweeping mountain vistas and picturesque scenery? Or perhaps a bustling urban scene simultaneously concealing and revealing its present and historical narratives? Of course, both are logical, as would be any number of visualisations in between. The landscapes we inhabit are constantly recording both man-made and natural changes occurring in it, and on it, and so on us.

Therefore, our beliefs and emotions framing our worldview are shaped by landscape in many ways, and so play a powerful role in making decisions and judgements about how a landscape should be used. Creative expression through art and narrative can influence decision-making by bringing those emotional responses to a landscape to the fore.

In this paper, we share our experiences to date from collaborations through the AHRC-funded network “Landscapes of the Mind”. The network aims to develop understanding and communication of landscape challenges in Scotland, with a view to informing decision making about landscape change. Network participants are from diverse backgrounds: musicians to metalworkers, archaeologists to anthropologists; our commonality is in how we bear witness to the evolution of Scotland's landscape from our different perspectives, particularly the balance

between landscape conservation and adaptation to changing culture, communities and societal needs.

The network was established shortly before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis so network participants, many of whom are new to working together, are exploring how the virtual space can influence and bolster the process of interdisciplinarity in-action, and bring new insights to the fore. Our attempt to flourish under current conditions has seen us adapt the visual-matrix - a psycho-social method with arts-practice - to the virtual space. This adapted approach brings together participants to engage in creative expressions online; expressions created by participants in relation to a particular theme. The creations, from photos, to poetry, to music, build the frame for the matrix, and act as a stimulus for participants to bring their associations to the material.

We will report on the findings from the first two matrices on Landscape and Water, and Landscape and Time, showing how the methodology allowed us to explore fluidity and place, time and space, as well as the benefits and challenges of communicating thoughts through digital means.