Global Challenges and Rural Landscapes: An Assemblage Approach

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Global Challenges

- Rise of the ‘global challenges’ discourse
- Way of framing major societal issues
- Scientisation of complex problems
- Way of organizing knowledge to present technocratic answers to these problems
- Key scientific and corporate actors
- Promotes universal global solutions
- Formulates technocratic answers in abstract spaces
Global Challenges and Rural Landscapes

• Delivering technocratic solutions to global challenges requires material interventions that are in places.
• In many cases these are located in rural places/landscapes.
• Tendency to imagine the rural as a blank space that can be repurposed to provide solutions to global challenges.
• Local conflicts as the meaning and use of rural spaces and landscapes are contested.
Adopting an Assemblage Approach?

• But which assemblage approach?

• Foucauldian – assembling ideas, knowledge, technologies to achieve power to act

• Latourian – material connections of assemblages

• Deleuzian/DeLandean – structures, shapes and interaction of assemblages
Global Assemblages

- Mobilisations empowered by global challenge discourses as ‘global assemblages’ in the Foucauldian sense describe by Collier & Ong (2005)
- “systems that mix technology, politics and actors in diverse configurations that do not follow given scales or political mappings” (Ong 2005, p 338)

- Global challenge assemblages bring together the ideas and technologies that legitimize a specific solution to a ‘global’ problem, the actors required to deliver it, and establish ways of working that transcend national boundaries
Technical Assemblages

• Solutions in global challenge discourses are delivered through technical assemblages whose construction can be viewed through a Latourian / actor-network perspective

• Assemblages with diverse material components and distributed agency, which need to be brought together in the right way to function

• Dependent on being connected into larger assemblages
DeLandean Assemblages

- Manuel DeLanda’s (2005, 2016) Deleuzian-derived framework of assemblages
- Society as “an assemblage of assemblages”
- Assemblages comprised by heterogeneous components with material and expressive roles
- Territorialisation (>heterogeneity) and deterritorialization
- Coding and de-coding
- Assemblages located in nested hierarches
- Interaction between assemblages, sharing and exchanging components
Global Challenge Assemblage

Connective assemblage

Technical assemblage (e.g. windfarm)

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Place assemblage

Landscape as an expressive component
Climate Change & the Global Renewables Assemblage

- Framing of renewable energy as a solution to the problem of reducing carbon-dependency to address the ‘global challenge’ of climate change
- Assemblage of ideas, technologies, corporations, market mechanisms, planning instruments, regulations etc
- Territorialisation: Promotion of technologies such as wind power & solar power as universal solutions
- Agent of globalization of rural landscapes
Technical Assemblages

- Wind turbines, solar power plants etc are complex assemblages of technologies & material components that all need to act together in assigned ways for the whole to function.
- Some components constructed from rare metals with very particular supply chains & impacts on distant rural landscapes.
- Require connecting to larger energy assemblages through connective assemblages of power lines etc.
OUR HOMES
OUR LAND
BUT NOT
OUR CHOICE
Assemblages in Landscape

• Wind turbines, solar panels etc inserted as new components in rural place-assemblages
• Material and expressive component
• Expressive meaning in climate change assemblage as symbols of hope, action etc
• Disruption to the expressive function of landscapes in place assemblages
• Different interpretations of different technologies in different settings
no more

dim rhagor
The significance of the skyline as an expressive component in place assemblages
Global Food Security Assemblage

• Framing of food security as a global problem
• Positioning of socio-technical ‘solutions’: biotechnology, modernization/intensification of farming, trade liberalization etc
• Assemblage of scientists, biotech corporations, agribusiness, international agencies, farmers, technologies, seed, crops, livestock etc
• Territorialisation of assemblage tending towards standardisation of seed, crops, breeds, processes etc
Agent of globalization of rural landscapes
Farms as Socio-Technical Assemblages

- In the global food security discourse, farms are re-coded as socio-technical assemblages in which components need to interact and perform in particular prescribed ways.
- Vulnerable to unanticipated external disruptions (e.g. weather, pathogens etc) (which in turn further socio-technical interventions try to mitigate)
- Vulnerable to dissonance of farmers – not performing roles as scripted/coded
Connective Assemblages

• Global food security discourse constructs food supply as a global system
• Dependent on connective assemblages that enable the transnational mobility of agricultural produce between farm and consumer (e.g. roads, trucks, canals, docks, ships, airports, containers, etc)
• Introduces vulnerabilities and possibilities of dissonance
• Infrastructure development in other rural landscapes – displaced landscape impacts of the global food security assemblage
Farms in the Rural Landscape

- Farms as dynamic assemblages that are reterritorialized and recoded as new socio-technical components are introduced
- Farms attached to new translocal assemblages (e.g. agribusiness corporations, markets)
- Material role of farms in agri-food assemblages remains fundamentally the same
- Farms are recoded as new components introduced and their part in the expressive role of landscape in place-assemblages
The controversial 'mega-dairies' that alarm campaigners and divide a struggling sector of British agriculture

Despite opposition, huge confinement units housing thousands of cows all year round are popping up across the UK.
“I feel it would be a catastrophe to see the Mackenzie Basin as green pasture land with herds of dairy cows grazing across the vista with a mountain backdrop. The reason I go to the Mackenzie is to see the different landscape; the barren yet beautiful tussockland is unsurpassed.”

Letter to *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 2009

“Even the colours are changing, the mosaic of tawny wheatfields and sheep country now broken by interloper greens and a more diverse palette of crops.”

*New Zealand Geographic*, 2010
Conclusions

• Why this matters

• Resistance or contestation to the landscape impacts of technocratic responses to global challenges may compromise ability to effectively deal with serious global problems

• Finding ways of balancing interests

• Acknowledging the expressive as well as the material

• Assemblage approaches provide a way of revealing and exploring these connections and tensions