



# Global Challenges and Rural Landscapes: An Assemblage Approach

**Michael Woods**

Aberystwyth University

[m.woods@aber.ac.uk](mailto:m.woods@aber.ac.uk)

[@globalrural](https://twitter.com/globalrural)





# 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/DeLandeian – 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



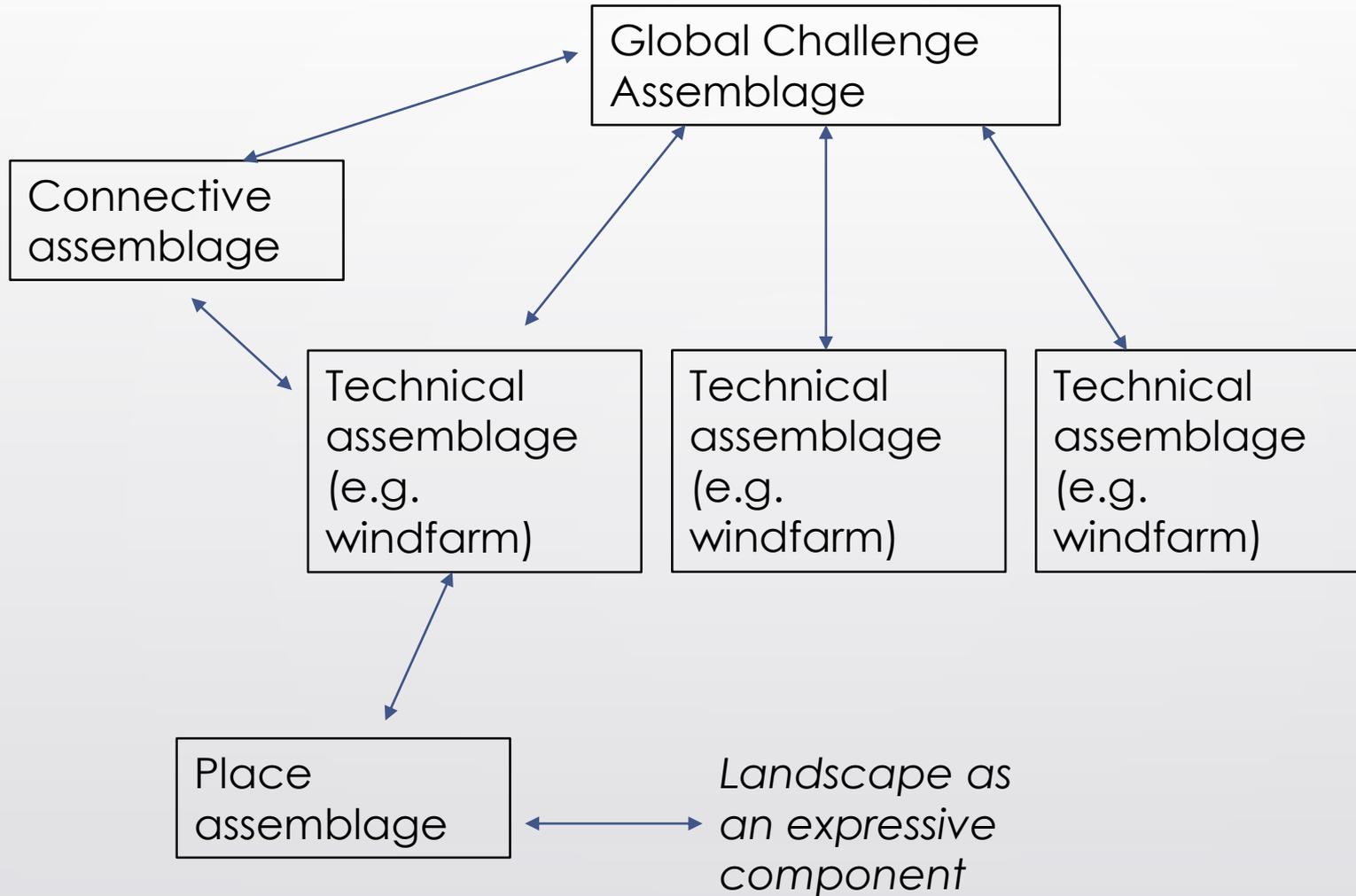
# Technical Assemblages

- 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



# DeLandeian 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





# 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

Australia



Germany



Spain



Wales

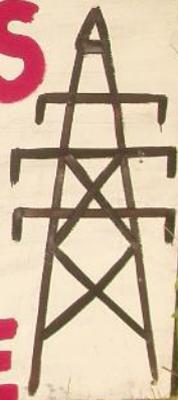




# Technical Assemblages

- 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



New Zealand



Germany



Belgium





# 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

## THE SILENT SPREAD OF US-STYLE "MEGA-DAIRIES"

ANDREW WASLEY × NOVEMBER 23, 2015

FARMING

The British countryside is being quietly populated with vast dairy units each housing up to 2,000 cows as farmers respond to plummeting milk prices by intensifying production, an investigation has revealed. By Andrew Wasley

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### The march of the industrial mega-dairy - is this the future of milk?

Andrew Wasley | 23rd November 2015



# Stop It



Campaign against Mega Dairies. Help us stop the slurry lagoon in Hartland, North Devon.

Home Mega Dairies Slurry Planning Pollution Object Contact





“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



Mackenzie Basin,  
South Island, NZ



# 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