

Planning Effective Conservation Landscapes for Nature and People: An Editorial Overview

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1. Introduction

The interrelated global crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, disease, and war are all caused and experienced by humankind. As nations plan for the future, the way in which these crises are addressed will have lasting impacts on the quality and health of people and the environment. More than ever, integrated landscape planning is required to ensure that effective conservation landscapes deliver measurable conservation outcomes alongside critical goods and services for the local people that depend on them [1–3]. For example, the One Health approach has become increasingly important and emphasizes the linkages between people and nature and the importance of diversification and building resilience [4].

The planning of sea- and landscapes going forward cannot be done without due consideration for both conservation and development [5]. The recent Global Risks Report [6] highlights that, over a 10-year time horizon, the health of the planet dominates the concerns of stakeholders, with environmental risks perceived to be the five most critical long-term threats to the world, as well as the most potentially damaging to people and the planet, with “climate action failure”, “extreme weather”, and “biodiversity loss” ranking as the top three most severe risks. Effectively planned conservation landscapes can serve to address many of these risks.

We use this Special Issue to review lessons learned from conservation practices that can help our collective actions as we navigate the challenges ahead and look to the opportunities that can benefit the land- and seascapes we rely on for economic, social, and ecological reasons. Themes that have emerged from the contributed articles are outlined below.

2. Overview of Special Issue

The articles in this Special Issue cover seven key themes: governance diversity, management capacity, financial sustainability, stakeholder engagement, international designations, and landscape-scale approaches and multi-use approaches to conservation. They explore key issues and lessons learned within these themes from local and national to regional and global levels. This diverse array of themes and spatial scales illustrates the complexity of integrating people and nature in conservation landscapes.

2.1. Governance Diversity

Protected areas are considered an essential tool for the protection of biodiversity, and they provide additional benefits and opportunities such as employment, social wellbeing and climatic buffers. Despite their adaption to new social considerations, the physical and political limitations of protected areas as a central conservation tool are becoming more transparent. A wave of recognition to the values of indigenous peoples and local



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communities' governance provides insights on how the diversity of decision-making within natural resource and protected areas management can enhance desired outcomes [7].

Within our Special Issue, insights from Namibia show how inland fisheries conservancies on the Kavango and Zambezi rivers are learning from more diverse stakeholder engagement and revising guidelines based on experience, contributing to the debate on the most effective institutional arrangements for conservation of fishery resources [8]. A national analysis of five different national parks in Iceland shows the value and adaptability of diverse governance systems and how lessons from these can help inform future plans at national and site levels [9].

2.2. Management Capacity

A study of China's protected area management system, coupled with insights from a global review, shows that successful management requires supporting management with specific infrastructural and other capacity elements [10].

2.3. Financial Sustainability

Achieving sustainable long-term financing is one of the major challenges for all conservation landscapes. Blended finance, the use of development finance to mobilise additional private investment, offers a potential model for funding nature conservation. Smith et al. [11] identify opportunities, barriers, and risks to up-scaling blended finance in the context of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in southern Africa. CBNRM investment or similar financial approaches could be transformational for hundreds of thousands of conservation enterprises and their beneficiaries regionally, but currently no such tailored de-risking mechanism exists.

2.4. Stakeholder Engagement

Insight from a study in the Czech Republic reveals that landscape users of different ages have a range of values they associate with a specific geography, suggesting that future plans for conservation management could benefit from increasing input that is inclusive [12]. Another study in Estonia has shown that the centralization of protected area management reduces the connection that local populations have to their environments and lessens the potential for protected areas to achieve the multiple objectives they are increasingly designed for [13].

2.5. International Designations

With increased recognition of the role of communities in the protection of some of the world's most threatened species and habitats, there are opportunities for international mechanisms to advance the ways in which they include diversity and ultimately support the custodians of nature. Verschuuren et al. [14] assessed the World Heritage system and found that the cultural and spiritual significance of sacred natural sites is under-recognised, especially in natural World Heritage sites. They provide recommendations on how sacred natural sites could be better represented in the process and how to involve their custodians in the World Heritage process and in site nomination, governance, and management.

2.6. Landscape-Scale Approaches

Meeting the needs of the future through landscape-scale approaches will be important to maintain the integrity of species and systems that span multiple political and physical geographies. Sultan et al. [15] have found the protection of the globally endangered snow leopard requires transboundary agreements and cooperation amongst the 12 countries that encompass the leopard's range. Similarly, a review of the European Union's agricultural biodiversity conservation policy reveals a gap in the potential to address critical issues because it is not including adequate landscape-scale design in its post-2023 plan [16].

2.7. Multi-Use Approaches to Conservation

Zhao et al. [17] conducted a global study to determine the impact of protecting extensive areas of the Earth, equating to 30% or more; they found that cropland could be maintained while pursuing globally ambitious targets but shared approaches to conservation are needed for success. Another study from Sweden's forests shows that evidence from monitoring of wood production should be used when analysing ecological indicators to augment the range of inputs that might be based on opinion [18].

3. Conclusions

Although this set of articles highlights a number of opportunities for bringing lessons from a broad range of themes into planning processes for the future, there are many more ways in which modern conservation practices can continue to evolve to address our changing world. Diversity of engagement opportunities, collaborations, and views are important for governing the future of conservation. Importantly, ensuring that science-based evidence is utilized in decisions related to policy and practice will be critical to address the challenges that exist at scales spanning geopolitical boundaries and from local to global levels.

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